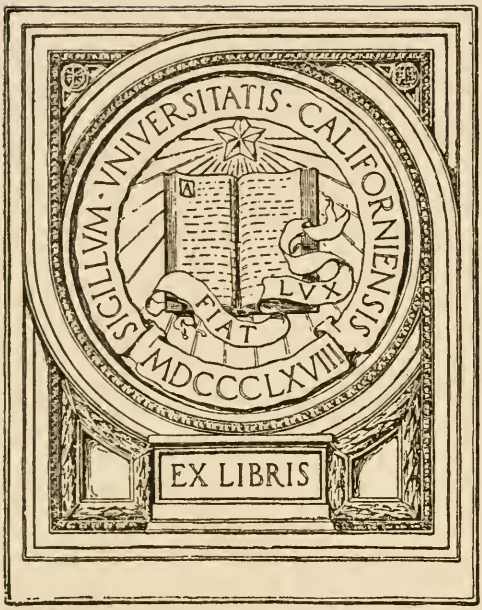
G·K·CHESTERTON

A·CRITICAL·STUDY·BY

JULIUS · WEST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G. K. CHESTERTON

G. K. Chesterton.
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G. K. CHESTERTON

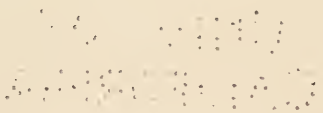
A CRITICAL STUDY

BY

JULIUS WEST

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY
1916

I HAVE to express my gratitude to Messrs. Burns and Oates, Messrs. Methuen and Co., and Mr. Martin Secker for their kind permission to quote from works by Mr. G. K. Chesterton published by them. I have also to express my qualified thanks to Mr. John Lane for his conditional permission to quote from books by the same author published by him. My thanks are further due, for a similar reason, to Mr. Chesterton himself.



PRINTED BY WILLIAM BRENDON AND SON, LTD.
PLYMOUTH, ENGLAND

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TO

J. C. SQUIRE

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I

INTRODUCTORY

The habit, to which we are so much addicted, of writing books about other people who have written books, will probably be a source of intense discomfort to its practitioners in the twenty-first century. Like the rest of their kind, they will pin their ambition to the possibility of indulging in epigram at the expense of their contemporaries. In order to lead up to the achievement of this desire they will have to work in the nineteenth century and the twentieth. Between the two they will find an obstacle of some terror. The eighteen nineties will lie in their path, blocking the way like an unhealthy moat, which some myopes might almost mistake for an aquarium. All manner of queer fish may be discerned in these unclear waters.

To drop the metaphor, our historians will find themselves confronted by a startling change. The great Victorians write no longer, but are succeeded by eccentrics. There is

Kipling, undoubtedly the most gifted of them all, but not everybody's darling for all that. There is that prolific trio of best-sellers, Mrs. Humphry Ward, Miss Marie Corelli, and Mr. Hall Caine. There is Oscar Wilde, who has a vast reputation on the Continent, but never succeeded in convincing the British that he was much more than a compromise between a joke and a smell. There is the whole Yellow Book team, who never succeeded in convincing anybody. The economic basis of authorship had been shaken by the abolition of the three-volume novel. The intellectual basis had been lulled to sleep by that hotchpotch of convention and largeness that we call the Victorian Era. Literature began to be an effort to express the inexpressible, resulting in outraged grammar and many dots. . . .

English literature at the end of the last century stood in sore need of some of the elementary virtues. If obviousness and simplicity are liable to be overdone, they are not so deadly in their after-effects as the bizarre and the extravagant. The literary movement of the eighteen nineties was like a strong stimulant given to a patient dying of old age. Its results were energetic, but the energy was convulsive. We should laugh if we saw a man apparently dancing in mid-air—until we noticed

the rope about his neck. It is impossible to account for the success of the Yellow Book school and its congeners save on the assumption that the rope was, generally speaking, invisible.

In this Year of Grace, 1915, we are still too close to the eighteen nineties, still too liable to be influenced by their ways, to be able to speak for posterity and to pronounce the final judgment upon those evil years. It is possible that the critics of the twenty-first century, as they turn over the musty pages of the Yellow Book, will ejaculate with feeling: "Good God, what a dull time these people must have had!" On the whole it is probable that this will be their verdict. They will detect the dullness behind the mechanical brilliancy of Oscar Wilde, and recognize the strange hues of the whole Æsthetic Movement as the garments of men who could not, or would not see. There is really no rational alternative before our critics of the next century; if the men of the eighteen nineties, and the queer things they gave us, were not the products of an intense boredom, if, in strict point of fact, Wilde, Beardsley, Davidson, Hankin, Dowson, and Lionel Johnson were men who rollicked in the warm sunshine of the late Victorian period, then the suicide, drunkenness and vice with

which they were afflicted is surely the strangest phenomenon in the history of human nature. To many people, those years actually were dull.

> The years from 1885 to 1898 were like the hours of afternoon in a rich house with large rooms; the hours before teatime. They believed in nothing except good manners; and the essence of good manners is to conceal a yawn. A yawn may be defined as a silent yell.

So says Chesterton, yawning prodigiously.

One may even go farther, and declare that in those dark days a yawn was the true sign of intelligence. It is no mere coincidence that the two cleverest literary debutants of that last decade, Mr. Max Beerbohm and the subject of this essay, both stepped on the stage making a pretty exhibition of boredom. When the first of these published, in 1896, being then twenty-four years old, his Works of Max Beerbohm he murmured in the preface, "I shall write no more. Already I begin to feel myself a trifle outmoded. . . . Younger men, with months of activity before them . . . have pressed forward . . . *Cedo junioribus.*"

So too, when Chesterton produced his first book, four years later, he called it *Greybeards at Play: Literature and Art for Old Gentlemen*, and the dedication contained this verse:

Now we are old and wise and grey,
And shaky at the knees ;
Now is the true time to delight
In picture books like these.

The joke would have been pointless in any other age. In 1900, directed against the crapulous exoticism of contemporary literature, it was an antidote, childhood was being used as a medicine against an assumed attack of second childhood. The attack began with nonsense rhymes and pictures. It was a complete success from the very first. There is this important difference between the writer of nonsense verses and their illustrator; the former must let himself go as much as he can, the latter must hold himself in. In *Greybeards at Play*, Chesterton took the bit between his teeth, and bolted faster than Edward Lear had ever done. The antitheses of such verses as the following are irresistible :

For me, as Mr. Wordsworth says,
The duties shine like stars ;
I formed my uncle's character,
Decreasing his cigars.

Or

The Shopmen, when their souls were still,
Declined to open shops—
And cooks recorded frames of mind,
In sad and subtle chops.

The drawings which accompanied these gems, it may be added, were such as the verses

deserved. They exhibit a joyous inconsistency, the disproportion which is the essence of parody combined with the accuracy which is the *sine qua non* of satire.

About a month after Chesterton had produced his statement of his extreme senility (the actual words of the affidavit are

> I am, I think I have remarked, [he had not],
> Terrifically old.)

he published another little book, *The Wild Knight and Other Poems*, as evidence of his youth. For some years past he had occasionally written more or less topical verses which appeared in The Outlook and the defunct Speaker. *Greybeards at Play* was, after all, merely an elaborate sneer at the boredom of a decade ; the second book was a more definite attack upon some points of its creeds and an assertion of the principles which mattered most.

> There is one sin : to call a green leaf grey,
> Whereat the sun in heaven shuddereth.
> There is one blasphemy : for death to pray,
> For God alone knoweth the praise of death.

Or again (*The World's Lover*)

> I stood and spoke a blasphemy—
> " Behold the summer leaves are green."

It was a defence of reality, crying for vengeance upon the realists. The word realism

had come to be the trade-mark of Zola and his followers, especially of Mr. George Moore, who made a sacrifice of nine obvious, clean and unsinkable aspects of life so as to concentrate upon the submersible tenth. Chesterton came out with his defence of the common man, of the streets

> Where shift in strange democracy
> The million masks of God,

the grass, and all the little things of life, "things" in general, for our subject, alone among modern poets, is not afraid to use the word. If on one occasion he can merely

> . . . feel vaguely thankful to the vast
> Stupidity of things,

on another he will speak of

> The whole divine democracy of things,

a line which is a challenge to the unbeliever, a statement of a political creed which is the outgrowth of a religious faith.

The same year Chesterton formally stepped into the ranks of journalism and joined the staff of The Daily News. He had scribbled poems since he had been a boy at St. Paul's School. In the years following he had watched other people working at the Slade, while he had gone on scribbling. Then he had begun to do little odd jobs of art criticism and

reviewing for The Bookman and put in occasional appearances in the statelier columns of The Speaker. Then came the Boer War, which made G. K. Chesterton lose his temper but find his soul. In 1900 The Daily News passed into new hands—the hands of G.K.C.'s friends. And until 1913, when the causes he had come to uphold were just diametrically opposed to the causes the victorious Liberal Party had adopted, every Saturday morning's issue of that paper contained an article by him, while often enough there appeared signed reviews and poems. The situation was absurd enough. The Daily News was the organ of Nonconformists, and G.K.C. preached orthodoxy to them. It advocated temperance, and G.K.C. advocated beer. At first this was sufficiently amusing, and nobody minded much. But before Chesterton severed his connection with the paper, its readers had come to expect a weekly article that almost invariably contained an attack upon one of their pet beliefs, and often enough had to be corrected by a leader on the same page. But the Chesterton of 1900 was a spokesman of the Liberalism of his day, independent, not the intractable monster who scoffed, a few years later, at all the parties in the State.

At this point one is reminded of Watts-Dun-

ton's definition of the two kinds of humour in The Renascence of Wonder: "While in the case of relative humour that which amuses the humorist is the incongruity of some departure from the laws of convention, in the case of absolute humour it is the incongruity of some departure from the normal as fixed by nature herself." We have our doubts as to the general application of this definition: but it applies so well to Chesterton that it might almost have come off his study walls. What made a series of more than six hundred articles by him acceptable to The Daily News was just the skilful handling of "the laws of convention," and "the normal as fixed by nature herself." On the theory enunciated by Watts-Dunton, everything except the perfect average is absolutely funny, and the perfect average, of course, is generally an incommensurable quantity. Chesterton carefully made it his business to present the eccentricity—I use the word in its literal sense—of most things, and the humour followed in accordance with the above definition. The method was simple. Chesterton invented some grotesque situation, some hypothesis which was glaringly absurd. He then placed it in an abrupt juxtaposition with the normal, instead of working from the normal to the actual, in the usual manner.

Just as the reader was beginning to protest against the reversal of his accustomed values, G.K.C. would strip the grotesque of a few inessentials, and, lo ! a parable. A few strokes of irony and wit, an epigram or two infallibly placed where it would distract attention from a weak point in the argument, and the thing was complete. By such means Chesterton developed the use of a veritable Excalibur of controversy, a tool of great might in political journalism. These methods, pursued a few years longer, taught him a craftsmanship he could employ for purely romantic ends. How he employed it, and the opinions which he sought to uphold by its means will be the subjects of the following chapters. Chesterton sallied forth like a Crusader against the political and literary Turks who had unjustly come into possession of a part of the heritage of a Christian people. We must not forget that the leading characteristic of a Crusader is his power of invigorating, which he applies impartially to virtues and to vices. There is a great difference between a Crusader and a Christian, which is not commonly realized. The latter attempts to show his love for his enemy by abolishing his unchristianness, the former by abolishing him altogether. Although the two methods are apt to give curiously

similar results, the distinction between a Crusader and a Christian is radical and will be considered in greater detail in the course of this study. This study does not profess to be biographical, and only the essential facts of Chesterton's life need be given here. These are, that he was born in London in 1873, is the son of a West London estate agent who is also an artist and a children's poet in a small but charming way, is married and has children. Perhaps it is more necessary to record the fact that he is greatly read by the youth of his day, that he comes in for much amused tolerance, that, generally speaking, he is not recognized as a great or courageous thinker, even by those people who understand his views well enough to dissent from them entirely, and that he is regarded less as a stylist, than as the owner of a trick of style. These are the false beliefs that I seek to combat. The last may be disposed of summarily. When an author's style is completely sincere, and completely part of him, it has this characteristic; it is almost impossible to imitate. Nobody has ever successfully parodied Shakespeare, for example; there are not even any good parodies of Mr. Shaw. And Chesterton remains unparodied; even Mr. Max Beerbohm's effort in A Christmas Garland rings false. His style

is individual. He has not " played the sedulous ape."

But, on the other hand, it is not proposed to acquit Chesterton of all the charges brought against him. The average human being is partly a prig and partly a saint; and sometimes men are so glad to get rid of a prig that they are ready to call him a saint—Simon Stylites, for example. And it is not suggested that the author of the remark, " There are only three things that women do not understand. They are Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," is not a prig, for a demonstration that he is a complete gentleman would obviously leave other matters of importance inconveniently crowded out. We are confronted with a figure of some significance in these times. He represents what has been called in other spheres than his " the anti-intellectualist reaction." We must answer the questions; to what extent does he represent mere unqualified reaction? What are his qualifications as a craftsman? What, after all, has he done?

And we begin with his romances.

II

THE ROMANCER

In spite of Chesterton's liberal production of books, it is not altogether simple to classify them into "periods," in the manner beloved of the critic, nor even to sort them out according to subjects. G.K.C. can (and generally does) inscribe an Essay on the Nature of Religion into his novels, together with other confusing ingredients to such an extent that most readers would consider it pure pedantry on the part of anybody to insist that a Chestertonian romance need differ appreciably from a Chestertonian essay, poem, or criticism. That a book by G.K.C. should describe itself as a novel means little more than that its original purchasing price was four shillings and sixpence. It might also contain passages of love, hate, and other human emotions, but then again, it might not. But one thing it would contain, and that is war. G.K.C. would be pugnacious, even when there was nothing to fight. His characters would wage their wars, even when

the bone of contention mattered as little as the handle of an old toothbrush. That, we should say, is the first factor in the formula of the Chestertonian romance—and all the rest are the inventor's secret. Imprimis, a body of men and an idea, and the rest must follow, if only the idea be big enough for a man to fight about, or if need be, even to make himself ridiculous about.

In *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* we have this view of romance stated in a manner entirely typical of its author. King Auberon and the Provost of Notting Hill, Adam Wayne, are speaking. The latter says :

"I know of a magic wand, but it is a wand that only one or two may rightly use, and only seldom. It is a fairy wand of great fear, stronger than those who use it—often frightful, often wicked to use. But whatever is touched with it is never again wholly common ; whatever is touched with it takes a magic from outside the world. If I touch, with this fairy wand, the railways and the roads of Notting Hill, men will love them, and be afraid of them for ever."

"What the devil are you talking about ?" asked the King.

"It has made mean landscapes magnificent, and hovels outlast cathedrals," went on the madman. "Why should it not make lamp-posts fairer than Greek lamps, and an omnibus-ride like a painted ship ? The touch of it is the finger of a strange perfection."

"What is your wand?" cried the King, impatiently.

"There it is," said Wayne; and pointed to the floor, where his sword lay flat and shining.

If all the dragons of old romance were loosed upon the fiction of our day, the result, one would imagine, would be something like that of a Chestertonian novel. But the dragons are dead and converted into poor fossil ichthyosauruses, incapable of biting the timidest damsel or the most corpulent knight that ever came out of the Stock Exchange. That is the tragedy of G.K.C.'s ideas, but it is also his opportunity. "Man is a creature who lives not upon bread alone, but principally by catch-words," says Stevenson. "Give me my dragons," says G.K.C. in effect, "and I will give you your catch-words. You may have them in any one of a hundred different ways. I will drop them on you when you least expect them, and their disguises will outrange all those known to Scotland Yard and to Drury Lane combined. You may have catastrophes and comets and camels, if you will, but you will certainly have your catch-words."

The first of Chesterton's novels, in order of their publication, is *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904). This is extravagance itself; fiction in the sense only that the events never

happened and never could have happened. The scene is placed in London, the time, about A.D. 1984. "This 'ere progress, it keeps on goin' on," somebody remarks in one of the novels of Mr. H. G. Wells. But it never goes on as the prophets said it would, and consequently England in those days does not greatly differ from the England of to-day. There have been changes, of course. Kings are now chosen in alphabetical rotation, and the choice falls upon a civil servant, Auberon Quin by name. Now Quin has a sense of humour, of absolute humour, as the Watts-Dunton definition already cited would have it called. He has two bosom friends who are also civil servants and whose humour is of the official variety, and whose outlook upon life is that of a Times leader. Quin's first official act is the publication of a proclamation ordering every London borough to build itself city walls, with gates to be closed at sunset, and to become possessed of Provosts in mediæval attire, with guards of halberdiers. From his throne he attends to some of the picturesque details of the scheme, and enjoys the joke in silence. But after a few years of this a young man named Adam Wayne becomes Provost of Notting Hill, and to him his borough, and more especially the little street in which he has spent his life, are things of

immense importance. Rather than allow that street to make way for a new thoroughfare, Wayne rallies his halberdiers to the defence of their borough. The Provosts of North Kensington and South Kensington, of West Kensington and Bayswater, rally their guards too, and attack Notting Hill, purposing to clear Wayne out of the way and to break down the offending street. Wayne is surrounded at night but converts defeat into victory by seizing the offices of a Gas Company and turning off the street lights. The next day he is besieged in his own street. By a sudden sortie he and his army escape to Campden Hill. Here a great battle rages for many hours, while one of the opposing Provosts gathers a large army for a final attack. At last Wayne and the remnants of his men are hopelessly outnumbered, but once more he turns defeat into victory. He threatens, unless the opposing forces instantly surrender, to open the great reservoir and flood the whole of Notting Hill. The allied generals surrender, and the Empire of Notting Hill comes into being. Twenty years later the spirit of Adam Wayne has gone beyond his own city walls. London is a wild romance, a mass of cities filled with citizens of great pride. But the Empire, which has been the Nazareth of the new idea, has waxed

fat and kicked. In righteous anger the other boroughs attack it, and win, because their cause is just. King Auberon, a recruit in Wayne's army, falls with his leader in the great battle of Kensington Gardens. But they recover in the morning.

"It was all a joke," says the King in apology. "No," says Wayne; "we are two lobes of the same brain . . . you, the humorist . . . I, the fanatic. . . . You have a halberd and I have a sword, let us start our wanderings over the world. For we are its two essentials."

So ends the story.

Consider the preposterous elements of the book. A London with blue horse-'buses. Bloodthirsty battles chiefly fought with halberds. A King who acts as a war correspondent and parodies G. W. Stevens. It is preposterous because it is romantic and we are not used to romance. But to Chaucer let us say it would have appeared preposterous because he could not have realized the initial premises. Before such a book the average reader is helpless. His scale of values is knocked out of working order by the very first page, almost by the very first sentence. ("The human race, to which so many of my readers belong, has been playing at children's games from the beginning, and will probably

do it till the end, which is a nuisance for the few people who grow up.") The absence of a love affair will deprive him of the only "human interest" he can be really sure of. The Chestertonian idiom, above all, will soon lead him to expect nothing, because he can never get any idea of what he is to receive, and will bring him to a proper submissiveness. The later stages are simple. The reader will wonder why it never before occurred to him that area-railings are very like spears, and that a distant tramcar may at night distinctly resemble a dragon. He may travel far, once his imagination has been started on these lines. When romantic possibilities have once shed a glow on the offices of the Gas Light and Coke Company and on the erections of the Metropolitan Water Board, the rest of life may well seem filled with wonder and wild desires.

Chesterton may be held to have invented a new species of detective story—the sort that has no crime, no criminal, and a detective whose processes are transcendental. *The Club of Queer Trades* is the first batch of such stories. *The Man who was Thursday* is another specimen of some length. More recently, Chesterton has repeated the type in some of the *Father Brown* stories. In *The Club of Queer Trades*, the transcendental detective is Basil Grant, to describe

whom with accuracy is difficult, because of his author's inconsistencies. Basil Grant, for instance, is "a man who scarcely stirred out of his attic," yet it would appear elsewhere that he walked abroad often enough. The essentials of this unprecedented detective are, however, sufficiently tangible. He had been a K.C. and a judge. He had left the Bench because it annoyed him, and because he held the very human but not legitimate belief that some criminals would be better off with a trip to the seaside than with a sentence of imprisonment. After his retirement from public life he stuck to his old trade as the judge of a Voluntary Criminal Court. "My criminals were tried for the faults which really make social life impossible. They were tried before me for selfishness, or for an impossible vanity, or for scandal-mongering, or for stinginess to guests or dependents." It is regrettable that Chesterton does not grant us a glimpse of this fascinating tribunal at work. However, it is Grant's job, on the strength of which he becomes the president and founder of the C.Q.T.—Club of Queer Trades. Among the members of this Club are a gentleman who runs an Adventure and Romance Agency for supplying thrills to the bourgeois, two Professional Detainers, and an Agent for Arboreal Villas, who lets off a

variety of birds' nest. The way in which these people go about their curious tasks invariably suggests a crime to Rupert Grant, Basil's amateur detective brother, whereupon Basil has to intervene to put matters right. The author does not appear to have been struck by the inconsistency of setting Basil to work to ferret out the doings of his fellow club-members. The book is, in fact, full of joyous inconsistencies. The Agent for Arboreal Villas is clearly unqualified for the membership of the Club. Professor Chadd has no business there either. He is elected on the strength of having invented a language expressed by dancing, but it appears that he is really an employee in the Asiatic MSS. Department of the British Museum. Things are extremely absurd in *The Eccentric Seclusion of the Old Lady.* At the instigation of Rupert, who has heard sighs of pain coming out of a South Kensington basement, Basil, Rupert, and the man who tells the story, break into the house and violently assault those whom they meet.

> Basil sprang up with dancing eyes, and with three blows like battering-rams knocked the footman into a cocked hat. Then he sprang on top of Burrows, with one antimacassar in his hand and another in his teeth, and bound him hand and foot almost before he knew clearly that his head had struck the floor. Then Basil sprang at Greenwood . . . etc. etc.

There is a good deal more like this. Having taken the citadel and captured the defenders (as Cæsar might say), Basil and company reach the sighing lady of the basement. But she refuses to be released. Whereupon Basil explains his own queer trade, and that the lady is voluntarily undergoing a sentence for backbiting. No explanation is vouchsafed of the strange behaviour of Basil Grant in attacking men who, as he knew, were doing nothing they should not. Presumably it was due to a Chestertonian theory that there should be at least one good physical fight in each book.

It will be seen that *The Club of Queer Trades* tends to curl up somewhat (quite literally, in the sense that the end comes almost where the beginning ought to be) when it receives heavy and serious treatment. I should therefore explain that this serious treatment has been given under protest, and that its primary intention has been to deal with those well-meaning critics who believe that Chesterton can write fiction, in the ordinary sense of the word. His own excellent definition of fictitious narrative (in *The Victorian Age in Literature*) is that essentially " the story is told . . . for the sake of some study of the difference between human beings." This alone is enough to exculpate him of the charge of writing

novels. The Chestertonian short story is also in its way unique. If we applied the methods of the Higher Criticism to the story just described, we might base all manner of odd theories upon the defeat (*inter alios*) of Burrows, a big and burly youth, by Basil Grant, aged sixty at the very least, and armed with antimacassars. But there is no necessity. If Chesterton invents a fantastic world, full of fantastic people who speak Chestertonese, then he is quite entitled to waive any trifling conventions which hinder the liberty of his subjects. As already pointed out, such is his humour. The only disadvantage, as somebody once complained of the Arabian Nights, is that one is apt to lose one's interest in a hero who is liable at any moment to turn into a camel. None of Chesterton's heroes do, as a matter of fact, become camels, but I would nevertheless strongly advise any young woman about to marry one of them to take out an insurance policy against unforeseen transformations.

Although it appears that a few reviewers went to the length of reading the whole of *The Man who was Thursday* (1908), it is obvious by their subsequent guesswork that they did not notice the second part of the title, which is, very simply, *A Nightmare*. The story takes

its name from the Supreme Council of Anarchists, which has seven members, named after the days of the week. Sunday is the Chairman. The others, one after the other, turn out to be detectives. Syme, the nearest approach to the what might be called the hero, is a poet whom mysterious hands thrust into an Anarchists' meeting, at which he is elected to fill the vacancy caused by the death of last Thursday. A little earlier other mysterious hands had taken him into a dark room in Scotland Yard where the voice of an unseen man had told him that henceforth he was a member of the anti-anarchist corps, a new body which was to deal with the new anarchists—not the comparatively harmless people who threw bombs, but the intellectual anarchist. "We say that the most dangerous criminal now is the entirely lawless modern philosopher," somebody explains to him. The bewildered Syme walks straight into further bewilderments, as, one after the other, the week-days of the committee are revealed. But who is Sunday? Chesterton makes no reply. It was he who in a darkened room of Scotland Yard had enrolled the detectives. He is the Nightmare of the story. The first few chapters are perfectly straightforward, and lifelike to the extent of describing personal details in a somewhat exceptional

manner for Chesterton. But, gradually, wilder and wilder things begin to happen—until, at last, Syme wakes up.

The trouble about *The Man who was Thursday* is not its incomprehensibility, but its author's gradual decline of interest in the book as it lengthened out. It begins excellently. There is real humour and a good deal of it in the earlier stages of Syme. And there are passages like this one on the "lawless modern philosopher":

> Compared to him, burglars and bigamists are essentially moral men; my heart goes out to them. . . . Thieves respect property. They merely wish the property to become their property that they may more perfectly respect it. But philosophers dislike property as property; they wish to destroy the very idea of personal possession. Bigamists respect marriage, or they would not go through the highly ceremonial and even ritualistic formality of bigamy. But philosophers despise marriage as marriage.

But his amiable flow of paradox soon runs out. The end of the book is just a wild whirl, a nightmare with a touch of the cinematograph. People chase one another, in one instance they quite literally chase themselves. And the ending has all the effect of a damaged film that cannot be stopped, on the large blank spaces of which some idiot has been drawing absurd

pictures which appear on the screen, to the confusion of the story. One remembers the immense and dominating figure of Sunday, only because the description of him reads very much like a description of Chesterton himself. But if the person is recognizable, the personality remains deliberately incomprehensible. He is just an outline in space, who rode down Albany Street on an elephant abducted from the Zoological Gardens, and who spoke sadly to his guests when they had run their last race against him.

Until recent years the word mysticism was sufficiently true to its derivation to imply mystery, the relation of God to man. But since the cheaper sort of journalist seized hold of the unhappy word, its demoralization has been complete. It now indicates, generally speaking, an intellectual defect which expresses itself in a literary quality one can only call woolliness. There is a genuine mysticism, expressed in Blake's lines :

> To see the world in a grain of sand
> And a Heaven in a wild flower,
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
> And Eternity in an hour.

And there is a spurious mysticism, meaningless rubbish of which Rossetti's Sister Helen

is a specimen. What could be more idiotic than the verse :

> " He has made a sign and called Halloo !
> Sister Helen,
> And he says that he would speak with you."
> " Oh tell him I fear the frozen dew,
> Little brother."
> (*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
> *Why laughs she thus between Hell and Heaven ?*)

The trouble about the latter variety is its extreme simplicity. Anybody with the gift of being able to make lines scan and rhyme can produce similar effects in a similar way. Hence the enormous temptation exercised by this form of mysticism gone wrong. There is a naughty little story of a little girl, relating to her mother the mishaps of the family coal merchant, as seen from the dining-room window. He slipped on a piece of orange-peel, the child had explained. " And what happened then ? " " Why, mummy, he sat down on the pavement and talked about God." Chesterton (and he is not alone in this respect) behaves exactly like this coal-heaver. When he is at a loss, he talks about God. In each case one is given to suspect that the invocation is due to a temporarily overworked imagination.

This leads us to *The Ball and the Cross* (1906). In *The Man who was Thursday,* when the

author had tired of his story, he brought in the universe at large. But its successor is dominated by God, and discussions on him by beings celestial, terrestrial, and merely infernal. And yet *The Ball and the Cross* is in many respects Chesterton's greatest novel. The first few chapters are things of joy. There is much said in them about religion, but it is all sincere and bracing. The first chapter consists, in the main, of a dialogue on religion, between Professor Lucifer, the inventor and the driver of an eccentric airship, and Father Michael, a theologian acquired by the Professor in Western Bulgaria. As the airship dives into the ball and the cross of Saint Paul's Cathedral, its passengers naturally find themselves taking a deep interest in the cross, considered as symbol and anchor. Lucifer plumps for the ball, the symbol of all that is rational and united. The cross

> " is the conflict of two hostile lines, of irreconcilable direction. . . . The very shape of it is a contradiction in terms." Michael replies, " But we like contradictions in terms. Man is a contradiction in terms ; he is a beast whose superiority to other beasts consists in having fallen."

Defeated on points, Lucifer leaves the Father clinging literally to the cross and flies away. Michael meets a policeman on the upper gallery

and is conducted downwards. The scene changes to Ludgate Circus, but Michael is no longer in the centre of it. A Scot named Turnbull keeps a shop here, apparently in the endeavour to counterbalance the influence of St. Paul's across the way. He is an atheist, selling atheist literature, editing an atheist paper. Another Scot arrives, young Evan MacIan, straight from the Highlands. Unlike the habitual Londoner, MacIan takes the little shop seriously. In its window he sees a copy of The Atheist, the leading article of which contains an insult to the Virgin Mary. MacIan thereupon puts his stick through the window. Turnbull comes out, there is a scuffle, and both are arrested and taken before a Dickensian magistrate. The sketch of Mr. Cumberland Vane is very pleasing: it is clear that the author knew what he was copying. Lord Melbourne is alleged to have said, "No one has more respect for the Christian religion than I have; but really, when it comes to intruding it into private life . . ." Mr. Vane felt much the same way when he heard MacIan's simple explanation: "He is my enemy. He is the enemy of God." He said, "It is most undesirable that things of that sort should be spoken about—a—in public, and in an ordinary Court of Justice. Religion

is—a—too personal a matter to be mentioned in such a place." However, MacIan is fined. After which he and Turnbull, as men of honour, buy themselves swords and proceed to fight the matter out. With interruptions due to argument and the police, the fight lasts several weeks. Turnbull and MacIan fight in the back garden of the man from whom they bought the swords,[1] until the police intervene. They escape the police and gain the Northern Heights of London, and fight once more, with a madness renewed and stimulated by the peace-making efforts of a stray and silly Tolstoyan. Then the police come again, and are once more outdistanced. This time mortal combat is postponed on account of the sanguinolence of a casual lunatic who worshipped blood to such a nauseating extent that the duellists deferred operations in order to chase him into a pond. Then follows an interminable dialogue, paradoxical, thoroughly Shavian, while the only two men in England to whom God literally is a matter of life and death find that they begin to regard the slaughter of one by the other as an unpleasant duty. Again

[1] Chesterton jeers at this man's "Scottish" ancestry because his surname was Gordon and he was obviously a Jew. The author is probably unaware that there are large numbers of Jews bearing that name in Russia. If he had made his Jew call himself Macpherson, the case would have been different.

they fight and are separated. They are motored by a lady to the Hampshire coast, and there they fight on the sands until the rising tide cuts them off. An empty boat turns up to rescue them from drowning; in it they reach one of the Channel Islands. Again they fight, and again the police come. They escape from them, but remain on the island in disguise, and make themselves an opportunity to pick a quarrel and so fight a duel upon a matter in keeping with local prejudice. But Turnbull has fallen in love. His irritatingly calm and beautiful devotee argues with him on religion until he is driven to cast off his disguise. Then the police are on his tracks again. A lunatic lends Turnbull and MacIan his yacht and so the chase continues. But by this time Chesterton is getting just a trifle bored. He realizes that no matter how many adventures his heroes get into, or how many paradoxes they fling down each other's throats, the end of the story, the final inevitable end which alone makes a series of rapid adventures worth while, is not even on the horizon. An element of that spurious mysticism already described invades the book. It begins to be clear that Chesterton is trying to drag in a moral somehow, if need be, by the hair of its head. The two yachters spend two weeks of

geographical perplexity and come to a desert island. They land, but think it wiser, on the whole, to postpone fighting until they have finished the champagne and cigars with which their vessel is liberally stored. This takes a week. Just as they are about to begin the definitive duel they discover that they are not upon a desert island at all, they are near Margate. And the police are there, too. So once more they are chased. They land in a large garden in front of an old gentleman who assures them that he is God. He turns out to be a lunatic, and the place an asylum. There follows a characteristic piece of that abuse of science for which Chesterton has never attempted to suggest a substitute. MacIan and Turnbull find themselves prisoners, unable to get out. Then they dream dreams. Each sees himself in an aeroplane flying over Fleet Street and Ludgate Hill, where a battle is raging. But the woolly element is very pronounced by this time, and we can make neither head nor tail of these dreams and the conversations which accompany them. The duellists are imprisoned for a month in horrible cells. They find their way into the garden, and are told that all England is now in the hands of the alienists, by a new Act of Parliament: this has been the only possible manner of putting

a stop to the revolution started by MacIan and Turnbull. These two find all the persons they had met with during their odyssey, packed away in the asylum, which is a wonderful place worked by petroleum machinery. But the matter-of-fact grocer from the Channel Island, regarding the whole affair as an infringement of the Rights of Man, sets the petroleum alight. Michael, the celestial being who had appeared in the first chapter and disappeared at the end of it, is dragged out of a cell in an imbecile condition. Lucifer comes down in his airship to collect the doctors, whose bodies he drops out, a little later on. The buildings vanish in the flames, the keepers bolt, the inmates talk about their souls. MacIan is reunited to the lady of the Channel Island, and the story ends.

When a stone has been tossed into a pond, the ripples gradually and symmetrically grow smaller. A Chesterton novel is like an adventurous voyage of discovery, which begins on smooth water and is made with the object of finding the causes of the ripples. As ripple succeeds ripple—or chapter follows chapter—so we have to keep a tighter hold on such tangible things as are within our reach. Finally we reach the centre of the excitement and are either sucked into a whirlpool, or hit on the

head with a stone. When we recover consciousness we feebly remember we have had a thrilling journey and that we had started out with a misapprehension of the quality of Chestertonian fiction. A man whose memory is normal should be able to give an accurate synopsis of a novel six months after he has read it. But I should be greatly surprised if any reader of *The Ball and the Cross* could tell exactly what it was all about, within a month or two of reading it. The discontinuity of it makes one difficulty; the substitution of paradox for incident makes another. Yet it is difficult to avoid the conviction that this novel will survive its day and the generation that begot it. If it was Chesterton's endeavour (as one is bound to suspect) to show that the triumph of atheism would lead to the triumph of a callous and inhuman body of scientists, then he has failed miserably. But if he was attempting to prove that the uncertainties of religion were trivial things when compared with the uncertainties of atheism, then the verdict must be reversed. The dialogues on religion contained in *The Ball and the Cross* are alone enough and more than enough to place it among the few books on religion which could be safely placed in the hands of an atheist or an agnostic with an intelligence.

If we consider *Manalive* (1912) now we shall be departing from strict chronological order, as it was preceded by *The Innocence of Father Brown*. It will, however, be more satisfactory to take the two Father Brown books together. In the first of these and *Manalive*, a change can be distinctly felt. It is not a simple weakening of the power of employing instruments, such as befell Ibsen when, after writing The Lady from the Sea, he could no longer keep his symbols and his characters apart. It is a more subtle change, a combination of several small changes, which cannot be studied fairly in relation only to one side of Chesterton's work. In the last chapter an attempt will be made to analyze these, for the present I can only indicate some of the fallings-off noticeable in *Manalive*, and leave it at that. Chesterton's previous romances were not constructed, the reader may have gathered, with that minute attention to detail which makes some modern novels read like the report of a newly promoted detective. But a man may do such things and yet be considered spotless. Shakespeare, after all, went astray on several points of history and geography. The authors of the Old Testament talked about "the hare that cheweth the cud." And, if any reader should fail to see the application of these instances to

modern fiction, I can only recommend him to read Vanity Fair and find out how many children had the Rev. Bute Crawley, and what were their names. No, the trouble with *Manalive* is not in its casual, happy-go-lucky construction. It is rather in a certain lack of ease, a tendency to exaggerate effects, a continual stirring up of inconsiderable points. But let us come to the story.

There is a boarding-house situated on one of the summits of the Northern Heights. A great wind happens, and a large man, quite literally, blows in. His name is Innocent Smith and he is naturally considered insane. But he is really almost excessively sane. His presence makes life at the house a sort of holiday for the inmates, male and female. Smith is about to run for a special licence in order to marry one of the women in the house, and the other boarders have just paired off when a telegram posted by one of the ladies in a misapprehension brings two lunacy experts around in a cab. Smith adds to the excitement of the moment by putting a couple of bullets through a doctor's hat.

Now Smith is what somebody calls "an allegorical practical joker." But Chesterton gives a better description of him than that.

He's comic just because he's so startlingly commonplace. Don't you know what it is to be in all one family circle, with aunts and uncles, when a schoolboy comes home for the holidays ? That bag there on the cab is only a schoolboy's hamper. This tree here in the garden is only the sort of tree that any schoolboy would have climbed. Yes, that's the sort of thing that has haunted us all about him, the thing we could never fit a word to. Whether he is my old schoolfellow or no, at least he is all my old schoolfellows. He is the endless bun-eating, ball-throwing animal that we have all been.

Innocent has an idea about every few minutes, but so far as the book is concerned we need mention only one of them. That one is—local autonomy for Beacon House. This may be recommended as a game to be played *en famille.* Establish a High Court, call in a legal member, and get a constitution. The rest will be very hilarious. The legal member of the Beacon House *ménage* is an Irish ex-barrister, one Michael Moon, who plans as follows :

The High Court of Beacon, he declared, was a splendid example of our free and sensible constitution. It had been founded by King John in defiance of Magna Carta, and now held absolute power over windmills, wine and spirit licences, ladies travelling in Turkey, revision of sentences for dog-stealing and parricide, as well as anything whatever that happened in the town of Market Bosworth. The whole

hundred and nine seneschals of the High Court of Beacon met about once in every four centuries ; but in the intervals (as Mr. Moon explained) the whole powers of the institution were vested in Mrs. Duke [the landlady]. Tossed about among the rest of the company, however, the High Court did not retain its historical and legal seriousness, but was used somewhat unscrupulously in a riot of domestic detail. If somebody spilt the Worcester Sauce on the tablecloth, he was quite sure it was a rite without which the sittings and findings of the Court would be invalid ; and if somebody wanted a window to remain shut, he would suddenly remember that none but the third son of the lord of the manor of Penge had the right to open it. They even went the length of making arrests and conducting criminal inquiries.

Before this tribunal Innocent Smith is brought. One alienist is an American, who is quite prepared to acknowledge its jurisdiction, being by reason of his nationality not easily daunted by mere constitutional queerness. The other doctor, being the prosecutor and a boarder, has no choice in the matter. The doctors, it should be added, have brought with them a mass of documentary evidence, incriminating Smith.

How the defence has time to collect this evidence is not explained, but this is just one of the all-important details which do not matter in the Chestertonian plane. Smith is

tried for attempted murder. The prosecution fails because the evidence shows Smith to be a first-class shot, who has on occasion fired life into people by frightening them. Then he is tried for burglary on the basis of a clergyman's letter from which it is gathered that Smith tried one night to induce him and another cleric to enter a house burglariously in the dark. This charge breaks down because a letter is produced from the other clergyman who did actually accompany Smith over house-tops and down through trap-doors—into his own house! Smith, it is explained, is in the habit of keeping himself awake to the romance and wonder of everyday existence by such courses. From the second letter, however, it appears that there is a Mrs. Smith, so the next charge is one of desertion and attempted bigamy. A series of documents is produced, from persons in France, Russia, China, and California recounting conversations with Smith, a man with a garden-rake, who left his house so that he might find it, and at the end leapt over the hedge into the garden where Mrs. Smith was having tea. In the words of the servant "he looked round at the garden and said, very loud and strong: 'Oh, what a lovely place you've got,' just as if he'd never seen it before." After which the court proceeds to try Smith on

a polygamy charge. Documentary evidence shows that Smith has at one time or another married a Miss Green, a Miss Brown, a Miss Black, just as he is now about to marry a Miss Gray, Moon points out that these are all the same lady. Innocent Smith has merely broken the conventions, he has religiously kept the commandments. He has burgled his own house, and married his own wife. He has been perfectly innocent, and therefore he has been perfectly merry. Innocent is acquitted, and the book ends.

In the course of *Manalive*, somebody says, "Going right round the world is the shortest way to where you are already." These are the words of an overworked epigrammatist, and upon them hangs the whole story. If *Manalive* is amusing, it is because Chesterton has a style which could make even a debilitated paradox of great length seem amusing. The book has a few gorgeous passages. Among the documents read at the trial of Innocent Smith, for example, is a statement made by a Trans-Siberian station-master, which is a perfectly exquisite burlesque at the expense of the Russian *intelligenzia*. The whole series of documents, in fact, are delightful bits of self-expression on the part of a very varied team of selves. While Chesterton is able to turn out

such things we must be content to take the page, and not the story, as his unit of work. *Manalive*, by the way, is the first of the author's stories in which women are represented as talking to one another. Chesterton seems extraordinarily shy with his feminine characters. He is a little afraid of woman. "The average woman is a despot, the average man is a serf."[1] Mrs. Innocent Smith's view of men is in keeping with this peculiar notion. "At certain curious times they're just fit to take care of us, and they're never fit to take care of themselves." Smith is the Chestertonian Parsifal, just as Prince Muishkin is Dostoievsky's.

The transcendental type of detective, first sketched out in *The Club of Queer Trades*, is developed more fully in the two Father Brown books. In the little Roman priest who has such a wonderful instinct for placing the diseased spots in people's souls, we have Chesterton's completest and most human creation. Yet, with all their cleverness, and in spite of the fact that from internal evidence it is almost blatantly obvious that the author enjoyed writing these stories, they bear marks which put the books on a lower plane than either *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* or *The Ball*

[1] *All Things Considered*, p. 106.

and the Cross. In the latter book Chesterton spoke of "the mere healthy and heathen horror of the unclean; the mere inhuman hatred of the inhuman state of madness." His own critical work had been a long protest against the introduction of artificial horrors, a plea for sanity and the exercise of sanity. But in *The Innocence of Father Brown* these principles, almost the fundamental ones of literary decency, were put on the shelf. Chesterton's criminals are lunatics, perhaps it is his belief that crime and insanity are inseparable. But even if this last supposition is correct, its approval would not necessarily license the introduction of some of the characters. There is Israel Gow, who suffers from a peculiar mania which drives him to collect gold from places seemly and unseemly, even to the point of digging up a corpse in order to extract the gold filling from its teeth. There is the insane French Chief of Police, who commits a murder and attempts to disguise the body, and the nature of the crime, by substituting the head of a guillotined criminal for that of the victim. In another story we have the picture of a cheerful teetotaller who suffers from drink and suicidal mania. There is also a doctor who kills a mad poet, and a mad priest who drops a hammer from the top of his church-tower upon his

brother. Another story is about the loathsome treachery of an English general. It is, of course, difficult to write about crime without touching on features which revolt the squeamish reader, but it can be done, and it has been done, as in the Sherlock Holmes stories. There are subjects about which one instinctively feels it is not good to know too much. Sex, for example, is one of them. Strindberg, Weininger, Maupassant, Jules de Goncourt, knew too much about sex, and they all went mad, although it is usual to disguise the fact in the less familiar terms of medical science. Madness itself is another such subject. There are writers who dwell on madness because they cannot help themselves—Strindberg, Edgar Allan Poe, Gogol, and many others—but they scarcely produce the same nauseating sensation as the sudden introduction of the note of insanity into a hitherto normal setting. The harnessing of the horror into which the discovery of insanity reacts is a favourite device of the feeble craftsman, but it is illegitimate. It is absolutely opposed to those elementary canons of good taste which decree that we may not jest at the expense of certain things, either because they are too sacred or not sacred enough. The opposite of a decadent author is not necessarily a writer who attacks decadents. Many

decadents have attacked themselves, by committing suicide, for example. The opposite of a decadent author is one to whom decadent ideas and imagery are alien, which is a very different thing. For example, the whole story *The Wrong Shape* is filled with decadent ideas; one is sure that Baudelaire would have entirely approved of it. It includes a decadent poet, living in wildly Oriental surroundings, attended by a Hindoo servant. Even the air of the place is decadent; Father Brown on entering the house learns instinctively from it that a crime is to be committed.

Considered purely as detective stories, these cannot be granted a very good mark. There is scarcely a story that has not a serious flaw in it. A man—Flambeau, of whom more later—gains admittance to a small and select dinner party and almost succeeds in stealing the silver, by the device of turning up and pretending to be a guest when among the waiters, and a waiter when among the guests. But it is not explained what he did during the first two courses of that dinner, when he obviously had to be either a waiter or a guest, and could not keep up both parts, as when the guests were arriving. Another man, a "Priest of Apollo," is worshipping the sun on the top of a "sky-scraping" block of offices in Westminster, while

a woman falls down a lift-shaft and is killed. Father Brown immediately concludes that the priest is guilty of the murder because, had he been unprepared, he would have started and looked round at the scream and the crash of the victim falling. But a man absorbed in prayer on, let us say, a tenth floor, is, in point of fact, quite unlikely to hear a crash in the basement, or a scream even nearer to him. But the most astonishing thing about *The Eye of Apollo* is the staging. In order to provide the essentials, Mr. Chesterton has to place " the heiress of a crest and half a county, as well as great wealth," who is blind, in a typist's office! The collocation is somewhat too singular. One might go right through the Father Brown stories in this manner. But, if the reader wishes to draw the maximum of enjoyment out of them, he will do nothing of the sort. He will believe, as fervently as Alfred de Vigny, that L'Idée C'est Tout, and lay down all petty regard for detail at the feet of Father Brown. This little Roman cleric has listened to so many confessions (he calls himself " a man who does next to nothing but hear men's real sins," but this seems to be excessive, even for a Roman Catholic) that he is really well acquainted with the human soul. He is also extremely observant. And his greatest friend

is Flambeau, whom he once brings to judgment, twice hinders in crime, and thenceforward accompanies on detective expeditions.

The Innocence of Father Brown had a *sequel*, *The Wisdom of Father Brown*, distinctly less effective, as sequels always are, than the predecessor. But the underlying ideas are the same. In the first place there is a deep detestation of "Science" (whatever that is) and the maintenance of the theory incarnate in Father Brown, that he who can read the human soul knows all things. The detestation of science (of which, one gathers, Chesterton knows nothing) is carried to the same absurd length as in *The Ball and the Cross*. In the very first story, Father Brown calls on a criminologist ostensibly in order to consult him, actually in order to show the unfortunate man, who had retired from business fourteen years ago, what an extraordinary fool he was.

The Father Brown of these stories—moon-faced little man—is a peculiar creation. No other author would have taken the trouble to excogitate him, and then treat him so badly. As a detective he never gets a fair chance. He is always on the spot when a murder is due to be committed, generally speaking he is there before time. When an absconding banker commits suicide under peculiar circumstances

in Italian mountains, when a French publicist advertises himself by fighting duels with himself (very nearly), when a murder is committed in the dressing-room corridor of a theatre, when a miser and blackmailer kills himself, when a lunatic admiral attempts murder and then commits suicide, when amid much incoherence a Voodoo murder takes place, when somebody tries to kill a colonel by playing on his superstitions (and by other methods), and when a gentleman commits suicide from envy, Father Brown is always there. One might almost interpret the Father Brown stories by suggesting that their author had written them in order to illustrate the sudden impetus given to murder and suicide by the appearance of a Roman priest.

Here we may suspend our reviews of Chestertonian romance. There remains yet *The Flying Inn*, which shall be duly considered along with the other débris of its author. In summing up, it may be said of Chesterton that at his best he invented new possibilities of romance and a new and hearty laugh. It may be said of the decadents of the eighteen nineties, that if their motto wasn't " Let's all go bad," it should have been. So one may say of Chesterton that if he has not selected " Let's all go mad " as a text, he should have

done. Madness, in the Chestertonian, whatever it is in the pathological sense, is a defiance of convention, a loosening of visible bonds in order to show the strength of the invisible ones; perhaps, as savages are said to regard lunatics with great respect, holding them to be nearer the Deity than most, so Chesterton believes of his own madmen. Innocent Smith, of course, the simple fool, the blithering idiot, is a truly wise man.

III

THE MAKER OF MAGIC

CHESTERTON'S only play, *Magic*, was written at the suggestion of Mr. Kenelm Foss and produced by him in November, 1913, at the Little Theatre, where it enjoyed a run of more than one hundred performances. This charming thing does not make one wish that Chesterton was an habitual playwright, for one feels that *Magic* was a sort of tank into which its author's dramatic talents had been draining for many years—although, in actual fact, Chesterton allowed newspaper interviewers to learn that the play had been written in a very short space of time. His religious ideas were expressed in *Magic* with great neatness. Most perhaps of all his works this is a quotable production.

Patricia Carleon, a niece of the Duke, her guardian, is in the habit of wandering about his grounds seeing fairies. On the night when her brother Morris is expected to return from America she is having a solitary moonlight

stroll when she sees a Stranger, "a cloaked figure with a pointed hood," which last almost covers his face. She naturally asks him what he is doing there. He replies, mapping out the ground with his staff:

> I have a hat, but not to wear;
> I have a sword, but not to slay;
> And ever in my bag I bear
> A pack of cards, but not to play.

This, he tells her, is the language of fairies. He tells her that fairies are not small things, but quite the reverse. After a few sentences have been spoken the prologue comes to an end, and the curtain rises upon the scene of the play, the drawing-room of the Duke. Here is seated the Rev. Cyril Smith, a young clergyman, "an honest man and not an ass." To him enters the Duke's Secretary, to tell him the Duke is engaged at the moment, but will be down shortly. He is followed by Dr. Grimthorpe, an elderly agnostic, the red lamp of whose house can be seen through the open French windows. Smith is erecting a model public-house in the village, and has come to ask the Duke for a contribution towards the cost. Grimthorpe is getting up a league for opposing the erection of the new public-house, and has also come to the Duke for help. They discover the nature of each other's errand.

Smith's case is, "How can the Church have a right to make men fast if she does not allow them to feast?"; Grimthorpe's, that alcohol is not a food. The Duke's Secretary enters and gives Smith a cheque for £50, then he gives the Doctor another—also for £50. This is the first glimpse we have of the Duke's eccentricity, an excessive impartiality based on the theory that everybody "does a great deal of good in his own way," and on sheer absence of mind—an absence which sometimes is absolutely literal. The Doctor explains in confidence to the Clergyman that there is something wrong about the family of Patricia and Morris, who are of Irish origin. . . ." They saw fairies and things of that sort."

SMITH. And I suppose, to the medieal mind, seeing fairies means much the same as seeing snakes?

DOCTOR. [*With a sour smile.*] Well, they saw them in Ireland. I suppose it's quite eorrect to see fairies in Ireland. It's like gambling at Monte Carlo. It's quite respectable. But I do draw the line at their seeing fairies in England. I do object to their bringing their ghosts and goblins and witehes into the poor Duke's own back garden and within a yard of my own red lamp. It shows a laek of tact.

Patricia, moreover, wanders about the park and the woods in the evenings. "Damp evenings for choice. She calls it the Celtic

twilight. I've no use for the Celtic twilight myself. It has a tendency to get on the chest." The Duke, annoyed by this love of fairies, has blundered, in his usual way, on an absurd compromise between the real and the ideal. A conjuror is to come that very night. When explanations have gone so far, the Duke at last makes his entry. The stage directions tell us that " in the present state of the peerage it is necessary to explain that the Duke, though an ass, is a gentleman." His thoughts are the most casual on earth. He is always being reminded of something or somebody which has nothing to do with the case. As for instance, " I saw the place you're putting up . . . Mr. Smith. Very good work. Very good work, indeed. Art for the people, eh ? I particularly liked that woodwork over the west door—I'm glad to see you're using the new sort of graining . . . why, it all reminds one of the French Revolution." After one or two dissociations of this sort, the expected Morris Carleon enters through the French window ; he is rather young and excitable, and America has overlaid the original Irishman. Morris immediately asks for Patricia and is told that she is wandering in the garden. The Duke lets out that she sees fairies ; Morris raves a bit about his sister being allowed out alone

with anything in the nature of a man, when Patricia herself enters. She is in a slightly exalted state ; she has just seen her fairy, him of the pointed hood. Morris, of course, is furious, not to say suspicious.

DOCTOR. [*Putting his hand on* MORRIS'S *shoulder.*] Come, you must allow a little more for poetry. We can't all feed on nothing but petrol.

DUKE. Quite right, quite right. And being Irish, don't you know, Celtic, as old Buffle used to say, charming songs, you know, about the Irish girl who has a plaid shawl—and a Banshee. [*Sighs profoundly.*] Poor old Gladstone ! [*Silence.*]

SMITH. [*Speaking to* DOCTOR.] I thought you yourself considered the family superstition bad for the health ?

DOCTOR. I consider a family superstition is better for the health than a family quarrel.

A figure is seen to stand in front of the red lamp, blotting it out for a moment. Patricia calls to it, and the cloaked Stranger with the pointed hood enters. Morris at once calls him a fraud.

SMITH. [*Quickly.*] Pardon me, I do not fancy that we know that . . .

MORRIS. I didn't know you parsons stuck up for any fables but your own.

SMITH. I stick up for the thing every man has a right to. Perhaps the only thing every man has a right to.

MORRIS. And what is that ?

SMITH. The benefit of the doubt.

Morris returns to the attack. The Stranger throws off his hood and reveals himself to the Duke. He is the Conjuror, ready for the evening's performance. All laugh at this *dénouement*, except Patricia, between whom and the Conjuror this bit of dialogue ensues :

STRANGER. [*Very sadly.*] I am very sorry I am not a wizard.

PATRICIA. I wish you were a thief instead.

STRANGER. Have I committed a worse crime than thieving ?

PATRICIA. You have committed the cruellest crime, I think, that there is.

STRANGER. And what is the cruellest crime ?

PATRICIA. Stealing a child's toy.

STRANGER. And what have I stolen ?

PATRICIA. A fairy tale.

And the curtain falls upon the First Act.

An hour later the room is being prepared for the performance. The Conjuror is setting out his tricks, and the Duke is entangling him and the Secretary in his peculiar conversation. The following is characteristic :

THE SECRETARY. . . . The only other thing at all urgent is the Militant Vegetarians.

DUKE. Ah ! The Militant Vegetarians ! You've

heard of them, I'm sure. Won't obey the law [*to the* CONJUROR] so long as the Government serves out meat.

CONJUROR. Let them be comforted. There are a good many people who don't get much meat.

DUKE. Well, well, I'm bound to say they're very enthusiastic. Advanced, too—oh, certainly advanced. Like Joan of Arc.

[*Short silence, in which the* CONJUROR *stares at him.*]

CONJUROR. *Was* Joan of Arc a Vegetarian ?

DUKE. Oh, well, it's a very high ideal, after all. The Sacredness of Life, you know—the Sacredness of Life. [*Shakes his head.*] But they carry it too far. They killed a policeman down in Kent.

This conversation goes on for some time, while nothing in particular happens, except that the audience feels very happy. The Duke asks the Conjuror several questions, receiving thoroughly Chestertonian answers. ["Are you interested in modern progress ?" "Yes. We are interested in all tricks done by illusion."] At last the Conjuror is left alone. Patricia enters. He attempts to excuse himself for the theft of the fairy tale. He has had a troublesome life, and has never enjoyed "a holiday in Fairyland." So, when he, with his hood up, because of the slight rain, was surprised by Patricia, as he was rehearsing his patter, and taken for a fairy, he played up to her. Patricia is inclined to forgive him, but the conversation is interrupted by the entrance of Morris, in a

mood to be offensive. He examines the apparatus, proclaims the way it is worked, and after a while breaks out into a frenzy of free thought, asking the universe in general and the Conjuror in particular for "that old apparatus that turned rods into snakes." The Clergyman and the Doctor enter, and the conversation turns on religion, and then goes back to the tricks. Morris is still extremely quarrelsome, and for the second time has to be quieted down. The Conjuror is dignified, but cutting. The whole scene has been, so far, a discussion on Do Miracles Happen? Smith makes out a case in the affirmative, arguing from the false to the true. Suppose, as Morris claims, the "modern conjuring tricks are simply the old miracles when they have once been found out. . . . When we speak of things being sham, we generally mean that they are imitations of things that are genuine." Morris gets more and more excited, and continues to insult the Conjuror. At last he shouts . . . "You'll no more raise your Saints and Prophets from the dead than you'll raise the Duke's great-grandfather to dance on that wall." At which the Reynolds portrait in question sways slightly from side to side. Morris turns furiously to the Conjuror, accusing him of trickery. A chair falls over, for no apparent cause, still further

exciting the youth. At last he blurts out a challenge. The Doctor's red lamp is the lamp of science. No power on earth could change its colour. And the red light turns blue, for a minute. Morris, absolutely puzzled, comes literally to his wits' end, and rushes out, followed shortly afterwards by his sister and the Doctor. The youth is put to bed, and left in the care of Patricia, while the Doctor and the Clergyman return to their argument. Smith makes out a strong case for belief, for simple faith, a case which sounds strangely, coming from the lips of a clergyman of the Church of England.

DOCTOR. Weren't there as many who believed passionately in Apollo ?

SMITH. And what harm came of believing in Apollo ? And what a mass of harm may have come of not believing in Apollo ? Does it never strike you that doubt can be a madness, as well be faith ? That asking questions may be a disease, as well as proclaiming doctrines ? You talk of religious mania ! Is there no such thing as irreligious mania ? Is there no such thing in the house at this moment ?

DOCTOR. Then you think no one should question at all ?

SMITH. [*With passion, pointing to the next room.*] I think that is what comes of questioning ! Why can't you leave the universe alone and let it mean what it likes ? Why shouldn't the thunder be Jupiter ?

More men have made themselves silly by wondering what the devil it was if it wasn't Jupiter.

DOCTOR. [*Looking at him.*] Do you believe in your own religion ?

SMITH. [*Returning the look equally steadily.*] Suppose I don't : I should still be a fool to question it. The child who doubts about Santa Claus has insomnia. The child who believes has a good night's rest.

DOCTOR. You are a Pragmatist.

SMITH. That is what the lawyers call vulgar abuse. But I do appeal to practice. Here is a family over which you tell me a mental calamity hovers. Here is the boy who questions everything and a girl who can believe anything. Upon whom has the curse fallen ?

At this point the curtain was made to fall on the Second Act. The Third and last Act takes place in the same room a few hours later. The Conjuror has packed his bag, and is going. The Doctor has been sitting up with the patient. Morris is in a more or less delirious state, and is continually asking how the trick was done. The Doctor believes that the explanation would satisfy the patient and would probably help him to turn the corner. But the Conjuror will not provide an explanation. He has many reasons, the most practical of which is that he would not be believed. The Duke comes in and tries to make a business matter

of the secret, even to the extent of paying £2000 for it. Suddenly the Conjuror changes his mind. He will tell them how the trick was done, it was all very simple. "It is the simplest thing in the world. That is why you will not laugh. . . . I did it by magic." The Doctor and the Duke are dumbfounded. Smith intervenes; he cannot accept the explanation. The Conjuror lets himself go, now he is voicing Chesterton's views. The clergyman who merely believes in belief, as Smith does, will not do. He must believe in a fact, which is far more difficult.

CONJUROR. I say these things are supernatural. I say this is done by a spirit. The doctor does not believe me. He is an agnostic; and he knows everything. The Duke does not believe me; he cannot believe anything so plain as a miracle. But what the devil are you for, if you don't believe in a miracle? What does your coat mean if it doesn't mean that there is such a thing as the supernatural? What does your cursed collar mean if it doesn't mean that there is such a thing as a spirit? [*Exasperated.*] Why the devil do you dress up like that if you don't believe in it? [*With violence.*] Or perhaps you don't believe in devils?

SMITH. I believe . . . [*After a pause.*] I wish I could believe.

CONJUROR. Yes. I wish I could disbelieve.

Here Patricia enters. She wants to speak

to the Conjuror, with whom she is left alone. A little love scene takes place: rather the result of two slightly sentimental and rather tired persons of different sexes being left alone than anything else. But they return to realities, with an effort. Patricia, too, wants to know how the trick was done, in order to tell her brother. He tells her, but she is of the world which cannot believe in devils, even although it may manage to accept fairies as an inevitable adjunct to landscape scenery by moonlight. In order to convince her the Conjuror tells her how he fell, how after dabbling in spiritualism he found he had lost control over himself. But he had resisted the temptation to make the devils his servants, until the impudence of Morris had made him lose his temper. Then he goes out into the garden to see if he can find some explanation to give Morris. The Duke, Smith, the Doctor, and the Secretary drift into the room, which is now tenanted by something impalpable but horrible. The Conjuror returns and clears the air with an exorcism. He has invented an explanation, which he goes out to give to Morris. Patricia announces that her brother immediately took a turn for the better. The Conjuror refuses to repeat the explanation he gave Morris, because if he did, "Half an hour after

I have left this house you will all be saying how it was done." He turns to go.

PATRICIA. Our fairy tale has come to an end in the only way a fairy tale can come to an end. The only way a fairy tale can leave off being a fairy tale.

CONJUROR. I don't understand you.

PATRICIA. It has come true.

And the curtain falls for the last time.

No doubt *Magic* owed a great deal of its success to the admirable production of Mr. Kenelm Foss and the excellence of the cast. Miss Grace Croft was surely the true Patricia. Of the Duke of Mr. Fred Lewis it is difficult to speak in terms other than superlative. Those of my readers who have suffered the misfortune of not having seen him, may gain some idea of his execution of the part from the illustrations to Mr. Belloc's novels. The Duke was an extraordinarily good likeness of the Duke of Battersea, as portrayed by Chesterton, with rather more than a touch of Mr. Asquith superadded. Mr. Fred Lewis, it may be stated, gagged freely, introducing topical lines until the play became a revue in little—but without injustice to the original. Several of those who saw *Magic* came for a third, a fourth, even a tenth time.

The Editor of The Dublin Review had the happy idea of asking Chesterton to review

Magic. The result is too long to quote in full, but it makes two important points which may be extracted.

I will glide mercifully over the more glaring errors, which the critics have overlooked—as that no Irishman could become so complete a cad merely by going to America—that no young lady would walk about in the rain so soon before it was necessary to dress for dinner—that no young man, however American, could run round a Duke's grounds in the time between one bad epigram and another—that Dukes never allow the middle classes to encroach on their gardens so as to permit a doctor's lamp to be seen there—that no sister, however eccentric, could conduct a slightly frivolous love-scene with a brother going mad in the next room—that the Secretary disappears half-way through the play without explaining himself; and the conjuror disappears at the end, with almost equal dignity. . . .

By the exercise of that knowledge of all human hearts which descends on any man (however unworthy) the moment he is a dramatic critic, I perceive that the author of *Magic* originally wrote it as a short story. It is a bad play, because it was a good short story. In a short story of mystery, as in a Sherlock Holmes story, the author and the hero (or villain) keep the reader out of the secret. . . . But the drama is built on that grander secrecy which was called the Greek irony. In the drama, the audience must know the truth when the actors do not know it. That is where the drama is truly democratic: not because the audience shouts, but because it knows—and is silent. Now I do quite seriously think it is a

weakness in a play like *Magic* that the audience is not in the central secret from the start. Mr. G. S. Street put the point with his usual unerring simplicity by saying that he could not help feeling disappointed with the Conjuror because he had hoped he would turn into the Devil.

A few additions may easily be made to the first batch of criticisms. Patricia's welcome to her brother is not what a long-lost brother might expect. There is really no satisfactory reason for the Doctor's continued presence. Patricia and Morris can only be half Irish by blood, unless it is possible to become Irish by residence. Why should the Conjuror rehearse his patter out in the wet ? Surely the Duke's house would contain a spare room ? Where did the Conjuror go, at the end of the Third Act, in the small hours of the morning ? And so on.

But these are little things that do not matter in an allegory. For in *Magic* " things are not what they seem." The Duke is a modern man. He is also the world, the flesh, and the devil. He has no opinions, no positive religion, no brain. He believes in his own tolerance, which is merely his fatuousness. He follows the line of least resistance, and makes a virtue of it. He sits on the fence, but he will never come off. The Clergyman is the church of to-day,

preaching the supernatural, but unwilling to recognize its existence at close quarters. As somebody says somewhere in *The Wisdom of Father Brown*, " If a miracle happened in your office, you'd have to hush it up, now so many bishops are atheists." The Doctor is a less typical figure. He is the inconsistencies of science, kindly but with little joy of life, and extremely Chestertonian, which is to say unscientific. Morris is the younger generation, obsessed with business and getting on, and intellectually incapable of facing a religious fact. Patricia is the Chestertonian good woman, too essentially domestic to be ever fundamentally disturbed. The Conjuror, if not the Devil, is at any rate that inexplicable element in all life which most people do not see.

Nevertheless there is a flaw in *Magic* which really is serious. If I were to see, let us say, a sheet of newspaper flying down the road against the wind, and a friend of mine, who happened to be a gifted liar, told me that he was directing the paper by means of spirits, I should still be justified in believing that another explanation could be possible. I should say, " My dear friend, your explanation is romantic ; I believe in spirits but I do not believe in you. I prefer to think that there is an air-current going the wrong way." That

is the matter with the Conjuror's explanation. Why should the Clergyman or the Doctor—professional sceptics, both of them, which is to say seekers after truth—take the word of a professional deceiver as necessarily true ?

There are two works which the critic of Chesterton must take into special consideration. They are *Magic* and *Orthodoxy ;* and it may be said that the former is a dramatized version of the latter. The two together are a great work, striking at the very roots of disbelief. In a sense Chesterton pays the atheist a very high compliment. He does what the atheist is generally too lazy to do for himself ; he takes his substitute for religion and systematizes it into something like a philosophy. Then he examines it as a whole. And he finds that atheism is dogma in its extremist form, that it embodies a multitude of superstitions, and that it is actually continually adding to their number. Such are the reasons of the greatness of *Magic.* The play, one feels, must remain unique, for the prolegomenon cannot be rewritten while the philosophy is unchanged. And Chesterton has deliberately chosen the word orthodox to apply to himself, and he has not limited its meaning.

IV

THE CRITIC OF LARGE THINGS

The heroes of Chesterton's romances have an adipose diathesis, as a reviewer has been heard to remark. In plain English they tend towards largeness. Flambeau, Sunday, and Innocent Smith are big men. Chesterton, as we have seen, pays little attention to his women characters, but whenever it comes to pass that he must introduce a heroine, he colours her as emphatically as the nature of things will admit. Which is to say that the Chestertonian heroine always has red hair.

These things are symptomatic of their author. He loves robustness. If he cannot produce it, he can at any rate affect it, or attack its enemies. This worship of the robust is the fundamental fact of all Chesterton's work. For example, as a critic of letters he confines himself almost exclusively to the big men. When Mr. Bernard Shaw a few years ago committed what Chesterton imagined was an attack upon Shake-

speare, he almost instinctively rushed to the defence in the columns of The Daily News. When Chesterton wrote a little book on *The Victorian Age in Literature* he showed no interest in the smaller people. The book, it may be urged in his excuse, was a little one, but we feel that even if it was not, Chesterton would have done much the same thing. Among the writers he omitted to mention, even by name, are Sir Edwin Arnold, Harrison Ainsworth, Walter Bagehot, R. Blackmore, A. H. Clough, E. A. Freeman, S. R. Gardiner, George Gissing, J. R. Green, T. H. Green, Henry Hallam, Jean Ingelow, Benjamin Jowett, W. E. H. Lecky, Thomas Love Peacock, W. M. Praed, and Mrs. Humphry Ward. The criticism which feeds upon research and comparison, which considers a new date or the emendation of a mispunctuated line of verse, worthy of effort, knows not Chesterton. He is the student of the big men. He has written books about Dickens, Browning, and Shaw, of whom only one common quality can be noted, which is that they are each the subjects of at least twenty other books. To write about the things which have already yielded such a huge crop of criticism savours at first of a lack of imagination. The truth is quite otherwise. Anybody, so to speak, can produce a book about

Alexander Pope because the ore is at the disposal of every miner. But that larger mine called Dickens has been diligently worked by two generations of authors, and it would appear that a new one must either plagiarize or labour extremely in order to come upon fresh seams. But Chesterton's taste for bigness has come to his service in criticism. It has given him a power of seeing the large, obvious things which the critic of small things misses. He has the " thinking in millions " trick of the statistician transposed to literary ends.

Or as a poet. The robustness is omnipresent, and takes several forms. A grandiloquence that sways uneasily between rodomontade and mere verbiage, a rotundity of diction, a choice of subjects which can only be described as sanguinolent, the use of the bludgeon where others would prefer a rapier.

Or as a simple user of words. Chesterton has a preference for the big words : awful, enormous, tremendous, and so on. A word which occurs very often indeed is mystic : it suggests that the noun it qualifies is laden with undisclosable attributes, and that romance is hidden here.

Now all these things add up, as it were, to a tendency to say a thing as emphatically as possible. Emphasis of statement from a

humorist gifted with the use of words results sometimes in epigram, sometimes in fun, in all things except the dull things (except when the dullness is due to an unhappy succession of scintillations which have misfired). For these reasons Chesterton is regarded as entirely frivolous—by persons without a sense of humour. He is, in point of fact, extremely serious, on those frequent occasions when he is making out a case. As he himself points out, to be serious is not the opposite of to be funny. The opposite of to be funny is not to be funny. A man may be perfectly serious in a funny way.

Now it has befallen Chesterton on more than one occasion to have to cross swords with one of the few true atheists, Mr. Joseph MacCabe, the author of a huge number of books, mostly attacking Christianity, and as devoid of humour as an egg-shell is of hair. The differences and the resemblances between Chesterton and Mr. MacCabe might well be the occasion of a parable. Chesterton has written some of the liveliest books about Christianity, Mr. MacCabe has written some of the dullest. Chesterton has written the most amusing book about Mr. Bernard Shaw ; Mr. MacCabe has written the dullest. Chesterton and Mr. MacCabe have a habit of sparring at one another, but up to the present I have not noticed either make any

palpable hits. It is all rather like the Party System, as Mr. Hilaire Belloc depicts it. The two antagonists do not understand each other in the least. But, to a certain degree, Mr. MacCabe's confusion is the fault of Chesterton and not of his own lack of humour. When Chesterton says, "I also mean every word I say," he is saying something he does not mean. He is sometimes funny, but not serious, like Mr. George Robey. He is sometimes irritating, but not serious, like a circus clown. And he sometimes appears to be critical, but is not serious, like the young lady from Walworth in front of a Bond Street shop-window, regretting that she could not possibly buy the crockery and glass displayed because the monogram isn't on right. Chesterton's readers have perhaps spoiled him. He has pleaded, so to speak, for the inalienable and mystic right of every man to be a blithering idiot in all seriousness. So seriously, in fact, that when he exercised this inalienable and mystic right, the only man not in the secret was G. K. Chesterton.

There are few tasks so ungrateful as the criticism of a critic's criticisms, unless it be the job of criticizing the criticisms of a critic's critics. The first is part of the task of him who would write a book in which all Chester-

ton's works are duly and fitly considered; and the second will not be wholly escaped by him. Concerned as we are, however, with the ideas of one who was far more interested in putting the world to rights than with guiding men and women around literary edifices, there is no need for us to give any very detailed study to Chesterton's critical work. Bacon said "distilled books are like common distilled waters, flashy things." A second distillation, perhaps even a third, suggests a Euclidean flatness. The sheer management of a point of view, however, is always instructive. We have seen an author use his exceptional powers of criticism upon society in general, and ideas at large. How is he able to deal with ideas and inventions stated in a more definite and particular manner? The latter task is the more difficult of the two. We all know perfectly well, to take an analogous illustration, how to deal with the Prussian militarist class, the "Junker caste," and so on. But we differ hopelessly on the treatment to be meted out to the National Service League.

The outstanding feature of Chesterton's critical work is that it has no outstanding features which differentiate it from his other writings. He is always the journalist, writing for the day only. This leads him to treat all

his subjects with special reference to his own day. Sometimes, as in the essay on Byron in *Twelve Types*, his own day is so much under discussion that poor Byron is left out in the cold to warm himself before a feebly flickering epigram. In writing of Dickens, Chesterton says that he "can be criticized as a contemporary of Bernard Shaw or Anatole France or C. F. G. Masterman . . . his name comes to the tongue when we are talking of Christian Socialists or Mr. Roosevelt or County Council Steamboats or Guilds of Play." And Chesterton does criticize Dickens as the contemporary of all these phenomena. In point of fact, to G.K.C. everybody is either a contemporary or a Victorian, and "I also was born a Victorian." Little Dorrit sets him talking about Gissing, Hard Times suggests Herbert Spencer, American Notes leads to the mention of Maxim Gorky, and elsewhere Mr. George Moore and Mr. William Le Queux are brought in. If Chesterton happened to be writing about Dickens at a time when there was a certain amount of feeling about on the subject of rich Jews on the Rand, then the rich Jews on the Rand would appear in print forthwith, whether or not Dickens had ever depicted a rich Jew or the Rand, or the two in conjunction. Chesterton's first critical work of importance

was *Robert Browning* in the "English Men of Letters Series." It might be imagined that the austere editorship of Lord Morley might have a dejournalizing effect upon the style of the author. Far otherwise. The t's are crossed and the i's are dotted, so to speak, more carefully in *Robert Browning* than in works less fastidiously edited, but that is all. The book contains references to Gladstone and Home Rule, Parnell, Pigott, and Rudyard Kipling, Cyrano de Bergerac, W. E. Henley, and the Tivoli. But of Browning's literary ancestors and predecessors there is little mention.

It is conventional to shed tears of ink over the journalistic touch, on the ground that it must inevitably shorten the life of whatever book bears its marks. If there is anything in this condemnation, then Chesterton is doomed to forgetfulness, and his critical works will be the first to slip into oblivion, such being the nature of critical works in general. But if this condemnation holds true, it includes also Macaulay, R. L. Stevenson, Matthew Arnold, and how many others! The journalistic touch, when it is good, means the preservation of a work. And Chesterton has that most essential part of a critic's mental equipment—what we call in an inadequately descriptive manner,

insight. He was no mean critic, whatever the tricks he played, who could pen these judgments :

The dominant passion of the artistic Celt, such as Mr. W. B. Yeats or Sir Edward Burne-Jones, lies in the word "escape"; escape into a land where oranges grow on plum trees and men can sow what they like and reap what they enjoy. (*G. F. Watts.*)

The supreme and most practical value of poetry is this, that in poetry, as in music, a note is struck which expresses beyond the power of rational statement a condition of mind, and all actions arise from a condition of mind. (*Robert Browning.*)

This essential comedy of Johnson's character is one which has never, oddly enough, been put upon the stage. There was in his nature one of the unconscious and even agreeable contradictions loved by the true comedian. . . . I mean a strenuous and sincere belief in convention, combined with a huge natural inaptitude for observing it. (*Samuel Johnson.*)

Rossetti could, for once in a way, write poetry about a real woman and call her "Jenny." One has a disturbed suspicion that Morris would have called her "Jehanne." (*The Victorian Age in Literature.*)

These are a few samples collected at random, but they alone are almost sufficient to enthrone Chesterton among the critics. He has a wonderful intuitive gift of feeling for the right metaphor, for the material object that best symbolizes an impression. But one thing he

lacks. Put him among authors whose view of the universe is opposed to his own, and Chesterton instantly adopts an insecticide attitude. The wit of Wilde moves him not, but his morals stir him profoundly; Mr. Thomas Hardy is "a sort of village atheist brooding and blaspheming over the village idiot." Only occasionally has he a good word to say for the technique of an author whose views he dislikes. His critical work very largely consists of an attempt to describe his subjects' views of the universe, and bring them into relation with his own. His two books on Charles Dickens are little more than such an attempt. When, a few years ago, Mr. Edwin Pugh, who had also been studying the "aspects" of Dickens, came to the conclusion that the novelist was a Socialist, Chesterton waxed exceeding wrath and gave the offending book a severe wigging in The Daily News.

He loves a good fighter, however, and to such he is always just. There are few philosophies so radically opposed to the whole spirit of Chesterton's beliefs as that of John Stuart Mill. On religion, economic doctrine, and woman suffrage, Mill held views that are offensive to G.K.C. But Mill is nevertheless invariably treated by him with a respect which approximates to reverence. The principal

case in point, however, is Mr. Bernard Shaw, who holds all Mill's beliefs, and waves them about even more defiantly. G.K.C.'s admiration in this case led him to write a whole book about G.B.S. in addition to innumerable articles and references. The book has the following characteristic introduction :

> Most people either say that they agree with Bernard Shaw or that they do not understand him. I am the only person who understands him, and I do not agree with him.

Chesterton, of course, could not possibly agree with such an avowed and utter Puritan as Mr. Shaw. The Puritan has to be a revolutionary, which means a man who pushes forward the hand of the clock. Chesterton, as near as may be, is a Catholic Tory, who is a man who pushes back the hand of the clock. Superficially, the two make the clock show the same hour, but actually, one puts it on to a.m., the other back to p.m. Between the two is all the difference that is between darkness and day.

Chesterton's point of view is distinctly like Samuel Johnson's in more respects than one. Both critics made great play with dogmatic assertions based on the literature that was before their time, at the expense of the literature that was to come after. In the book on

Shaw, Chesterton strikes a blow at all innovators, although he aims only at the obvious failures.

> The truth is that all feeble spirits naturally live in the future, because it is featureless ; it is a soft job ; you can make it what you like. The next age is blank, and I can paint it freely with my favourite colour. It requires real courage to face the past, because the past is full of facts which cannot be got over ; of men certainly wiser than we and of things done which we cannot do. I know I cannot write a poem as good as *Lycidas*. But it is always easy to say that the particular sort of poetry I can write will be the poetry of the future.

Sentiments such as these have made many young experimentalists feel that Chesterton is a traitor to his youth and generation. Nobody will ever have the detachment necessary to appreciate " futurist " poetry until it is very much a thing of the past, because the near past is so much with us, and it is part of us, which the future is not. But fidelity to the good things of the past does not exonerate us from the task of looking for the germs of the good things of the future. The young poet of to-day sits at the feet of Sir Henry Newbolt, whose critical appreciation is undaunted by mere dread of new things, while to the same youth and to his friends it has simply never occurred, often enough, to

think of Chesterton as a critic. It cannot be too strongly urged that an undue admiration of the distant past has sat like an incubus upon the chest of European literature, and Shakespeare's greatness is not in spite of his "small Latin and less Greek," which probably contributed to it indirectly. Had Shakespeare been a classical scholar, he would almost certainly have modelled his plays on Seneca or Aeschylus, and the results would have been devastating. Addison's Cato, Johnson's Irene, and the dramas of Racine and Corneille are among the abysmal dullnesses mankind owes to its excessive estimation of the past. Men have always been too ready to forget that we inherit our ancestors' bad points as well as their good ones. Ancestor-worship has deprived the Chinese of the capacity to create, it has seriously affected Chesterton's power to criticize. Chesterton's own generation has seen both the victory and the downfall of form in the novels of Mr. Galsworthy and Mr. H. G. Wells. It has witnessed fascinating experiments in stagecraft, some of which have assuredly succeeded. It has listened to new poets and wandered in enchanted worlds where no Victorians trod. A critic in sympathy with these efforts at reform would have written the last-quoted passage something like this :

"The truth is that all feeble spirits naturally live in the past, because it has no boundaries; it is a soft job; you can find in it what you like. The past ages are rank, and I can daub myself freely with whatever colours I extract. It requires no courage to face the past, because the past is full of facts which neutralize one another; of men certainly no wiser than we, and of things done which we could not want to do. I know I cannot write a poem as good as Lycidas. But I also know that Milton could not write a poem as good as The Hound of Heaven or M'Andrew's Hymn. And it is always easy to say that the particular kind of poetry I can write has been the poetry of some period of the past."

But Chesterton didn't; quite the reverse.

So that one comes to the sorrowful conclusion that Chesterton is at his best, as a critic, when he is writing introductions, because then he has to leave the past alone. When he is writing an introduction to one of the works of a great Victorian (Dickens always excepted) he makes his subject stand out like a solitary giant, not necessarily because he is one, but on account of the largeness of the contours, the rough shaping, and the deliberate contrasts. He has written prefaces without number, and the British Museum has not a complete

set of the books introduced by him. The Fables of Æsop, the Book of Job, Matthew Arnold's Critical Essays, a book of children's poems by Margaret Arndt, Boswell's Johnson, a novel by Gorky, selections from Thackeray, a life of Mr. Will Crooks, and an anthology by young poets are but a few of the books he has explained.

The last thing to be said on Chesterton as a critic is by way of illustration. For a series of books on artists, he wrote two, on William Blake and G. F. Watts. The first is all about mysticism, and so is the second. They are for the layman, not for the artist. They could be read with interest and joy by the colour-blind. And, incidentally, they are extremely good criticism. Therein is the triumph of Chesterton. Give him a subject which he can relate with his own view of the universe, and space wherein to accomplish this feat, and he will succeed in presenting his readers with a vividly outlined portrait, tinted, of course, with his own personality, but indisputably true to life, and ornamented with fascinating little gargoyles. But put him among the bourgeoisie of literature and he will sulk like an angry child.

V

THE HUMORIST AND THE POET

THERE are innumerable books—or let us say twenty—on Mr. Bernard Shaw. They deal with him as a sociologist, a dramatist, or what not, but never as a humorist. There is a mass of books on Oscar Wilde, and they deal with everything concerned with him, except his humour. The great humorists—as such—go unsung to their graves. That is because there is nothing so obvious as a joke, and nothing so difficult to explain. It requires a psychologist, like William James, or a philosopher, like Bergson, to explain what a joke is, and then most of us cannot understand the explanation. A joke—especially another man's joke—is a thing to be handled delicately and reverently, for once the bloom is off, the joke mysteriously shrivels and vanishes. Translators are the sworn enemies of jokes; the exigencies of their deplorable trade cause them to maul the poor little things about while they

are putting them into new clothes, and the result is death, or at the least an appearance of vacuous senescence. But jokes are only the crystallization of humour; it exists also in less tangible forms, such as style and all that collection of effects vaguely lumped together and called "atmosphere." Chesterton's peculiar "atmosphere" rises like a sweet exhalation from the very ink he sheds. And it is frankly indefinable, as all genuine style is. The insincere stylists can be reduced to a formula, because they work from a formula; Pater may be brought down to an arrangement of adjectives and commas, Doctor Johnson to a succession of rhythms, carefully pruned of excrescences, and so on, but the stylist who writes as God made him defies such analysis. Meredith and Shaw and Chesterton will remain mysteries even unto the latest research student of the Universities of Jena and Chicago. Patient students (something of the sort is already being done) will count up the number of nouns and verbs and commas in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and will express the result in such a form as this—

$$\text{Chesterton (G. K.)} = \iint \frac{\text{nouns}^3}{\text{verbs}^2} + \sqrt{c \cdot 2\log_e bn} - \frac{\sin A}{47}$$

But they will fail to touch the essential Ches-

terton, because one of the beauties of this form of analysis is that when the formula has been obtained, nobody is any the wiser as to the manner of its use. We know that James Smith is composed of beef and beer and bread, because all evidence goes to show that these are the only things he ever absorbs, but nobody has ever suggested that a synthesis of food-stuffs will ever give us James Smith.

Now the difficulty of dealing with the humour of Chesterton is that, in doing so, one is compelled to handle it, to its detriment. If in the chapter on his Romances any reader thought he detected the voice and the style of Chesterton, he is grievously mistaken. He only saw the scaffolding, which bears the same relation to the finished product as the skeleton bears to the human body.

Consider these things:

If you throw one bomb you are only a murderer; but if you keep on persistently throwing bombs, you are in awful danger of at last becoming a prig.

If we all floated in the air like bubbles, free to drift anywhere at any instant, the practical result would be that no one would have the courage to begin a conversation.

If the public schools stuck up a notice it ought to be inscribed, "For the Fathers of Gentlemen only." In two generations they can do the trick.

Now these propositions are not merely snippets from a system of philosophy, presented after the manner of the admirers of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. These are quotations which display a quite exceptional power of surprising people. The anticlimaxes of the first two passages, the bold dip into the future at the expense of the past in the third are more than instances of mere verbal felicity. They indicate a writer capable of the humour which feeds upon daily life, and is therefore thoroughly democratic and healthy. For there are two sorts of humour; that which feeds upon its possessor, Oscar Wilde is the supreme example of this type of humorist, and that which draws its inspiration from its surroundings, of which the great exemplar is Dickens, and Chesterton is his follower. The first exhausts itself sooner or later, because it feeds on its own blood, the second is inexhaustible. This theory may be opposed on the ground that humour is both internal and external in its origin. The supporters of this claim are invited to take a holiday in bed, or elsewhere away from the madding crowd, and then see how humorous they can be.

Humour has an unfortunate tendency to stale. The joke of yesteryear already shows frays upon its sleeves. The wit of the early

volumes of Punch is in the last stages of decrepitude. Watch an actor struggling to conceal from his audience the fact that he is repeating one of Shakespeare's puns. We tolerate the humour of Congreve, not because it is thoroughly amusing, but because it has survived better than most. Humorous verse stands a slightly better chance of evoking smiles in its old age. There is always its unalterable verbal neatness; tradition, too, lingers more lovingly around fair shapes, and a poem is a better instance of form than a paragraph. Mankind may grow blasé, if it will, but as a poet of the comic, Chesterton will live long years. Take for example that last and worst of his novels *The Flying Inn.* Into this he has pitched with a fascinating recklessness a quantity of poems, garnered from The New Witness and worthy of the immortality which is granted the few really good comic poems. There is the poem of Noah, with that stimulating line with which each stanza ends. The last one goes :

But Noah he sinned, and we have sinned ; on tipsy feet we trod,
Till a great big black teetotaller was sent to us for a rod,
And you can't get wine at a P.S.A., or Chapel, or Eisteddfod ;
For the Curse of Water has come again because of the wrath of God.

And water is on the Bishop's board, and the Higher Thinker's shrine,
But I don't care where the water goes if it doesn't get into the wine.

There is a lunatic song against grocers, who are accused of nonconformity, and an equally lunatic song in several instalments on being a vegetarian :

I am silent in the Club,
I am silent in the pub,
I am silent on a bally peak in Darien ;
For I stuff away for life
Shoving peas in with a knife,
Because I am at heart a vegetarian.

There is a joyous thing about a millionaire who lived the simple life, and a new version of " St. George for Merry England." Tea, cocoa, and soda-water are the subjects of another poem. The verses about Roundabout are very happy :

Some say that when Sir Lancelot
Went forth to find the Grail,
Grey Merlin wrinkled up the roads,
For hope that he should fail ;
All roads led back to Lyonnesse
And Camelot in the Vale,
I cannot yield assent to this
Extravagant hypothesis,
The plain shrewd Briton will dismiss
Such rumours (*Daily Mail*).

But in the streets of Roundabout
Are no such factions found,
Or theories to expound about
Or roll upon the ground about,
In the happy town of Roundabout,
That makes the world go round.

And there are lots more like this.

Then there are the *Ballades Urbane* which appeared in the early volumes of The Eye-Witness. They have refrains with the true human note. Such as "But will you lend me two-and-six?"

Envoi

Prince, I will not be knighted! No!
Put up your sword and stow your tricks!
Offering the Garter is no go—
BUT WILL YOU LEND ME TWO-AND-SIX?

In prose Chesterton is seldom the mere jester; he will always have a moral or two, at the very least, at his fingers' ends, or to be quite exact, at the end of his article. He is never quite irresponsible. He seldom laughs at a man who is not a reformer.

Or let us take another set of illustrations, this time in prose. (Once more I protest that I shall not take the reader through all the works of Chesterton.) I mean the articles "Our Note Book" which he contributed to The Illustrated London News. They are of a

familiar type ; a series of paragraphs on some topical subject, with little spaces between them in order to encourage the weary reader. Chesterton wrote this class of article supremely well. He would seize on something apparently trivial, and exalt it into a symptom. When he had given the disease a name, he went for the quack doctors who professed to remedy it. He goes to Letchworth, in which abode of middle-class faddery he finds a teetotal public-house, pretending to look like the real thing, and calling itself "The Skittles Inn." He immediately raises the question, Can we dissociate beer from skittles ? Then he widens out his thesis.

> Our life to-day is marked by perpetual attempts to revive old-fashioned things while omitting the human soul in them that made them more than fashions.

And he concludes :

> I welcome a return to the rudeness of old times ; when Luther attacked Henry VIII for being fat ; and when Milton and his Dutch opponent devoted pages of their controversy to the discussion of which of them was the uglier. . . . The new controversialists . . . call a man a physical degenerate, instead of calling him an ugly fellow. They say that red hair is the mark of the Celtic stock, instead of calling him "Carrots."

Of this class of fun Chesterton is an easy master. It makes him a fearsome controversialist on the platform or in his favourite lists, the columns of a newspaper. But he uses his strength a little tyrannously. He is an adept at begging the question. The lost art called ignoratio elenchi has been privately rediscovered by him, to the surprise of many excellent and honest debaters, who have never succeeded in scoring the most obvious points in the face of Chesterton's power of emitting a string of epigrams and pretending it is a chain of argument. The case, in whatever form it is put, is always fresh and vigorous. Another epigrammatist, Oscar Wilde, in comparison with him may be said to have used the midnight oil so liberally in the preparation of his witticisms, that one might almost detect the fishy odour. But as with his prose so with his verses; Chesterton's productions are so fresh that they seem to spring from his vitality rather than his intellect. They are generally a trifle ragged and unpolished as if, like all their author's productions, they were strangers to revision. And vitality demands boisterous movement, more even than coherence. Sometimes the boisterousness is apparently unsupported by the sense of the words.

So you have gained the golden crowns and grasped the golden weather,
The kingdoms and the hemispheres that all men buy and sell,
But I will lash the leaping drum and swing the flaring feather,
For the light of seven heavens that are lost to me like hell.

Here the stanza actually goes with such a swing that the reader will in all probability not notice that the lines have no particular meaning.

On the other hand, Chesterton's poetry has exuberant moments of sheer delight. In one of his essays he is lamenting the songlessness of modern life and suggests one or two chanties. Here they are :

Chorus of Bank Clerks :

Up, my lads, and lift the ledgers, sleep and ease are o'er.
Hear the Stars of Morning shouting : " Two and Two are Four."
Though the creeds and realms are reeling, though the sophists roar,
Though we weep and pawn our watches, Two and Two are Four.

Chorus of Bank Clerks when there is a run on the bank :

There's a run upon the Bank—
Stand away !
For the Manager's a crank and the Secretary drank, and the Upper Tooting Bank
Turns to bay !

Stand close : there is a run
On the Bank.
Of our ship, our royal one, let the ringing legend run,
that she fired with every gun
Ere she sank.

The Post Office Hymn would begin as follows :

O'er London our letters are shaken like snow,
Our wires o'er the world like the thunderbolts go.
The news that may marry a maiden in Sark,
Or kill an old lady in Finsbury Park.

Chorus (with a swing of joy and energy) :

Or kill an old lady in Finsbury Park.

The joke becomes simply immense when we picture the actual singing of the songs.

But that is not the only class of humour of which Chesterton is capable. He can cut as well as hack. It is to be doubted whether any politician was ever addressed in lines more sarcastic than those of *Antichrist*, an ode to Mr. F. E. Smith. This gentleman, speaking on the Welsh Disestablishment Bill, remarked that it " has shocked the conscience of every Christian community in Europe." It begins :

Are they clinging to their crosses,
F. E. Smith.
Where the Breton boat-fleet tosses,
Are they, Smith ?
Do they, fasting, tramping, bleeding,
Wait the news from this our city ?
Groaning " That's the Second Reading ! "
Hissing " There is still Committee ! "

If the voice of Cecil falters,
If McKenna's point has pith,
Do they tremble for their altars ?
Do they, Smith ?

Then in Russia, among the peasants,

Where Establishment means nothing
And they never heard of Wales,
Do they read it all in Hansard
With a crib to read it with—
" Welsh Tithes : Dr. Clifford answered."
Really, Smith ?

The final verse is :

It would greatly, I must own,
Soothe me, Smith,
If you left this theme alone.
Holy Smith !
For your legal cause or civil
You fight well and get your fee ;
For your God or dream or devil
You will answer, not to me.
Talk about the pews and steeples
And the Cash that goes therewith !
But the souls of Christian peoples . . .
—Chuck it, Smith !

The wilting sarcasm of this poem is a feature which puts it with a few others apart from the bulk of Chesterton's poems. Even as bellicosity and orthodoxy are two of the brightest threads which run through the whole texture of his work, so Poems of Pugnacity (as Ella Wheeler Wilcox would say) and religious verses constitute the largest part of the poetic works of

G.K.C. His first book of verses—after *Greybeards at Play*—*The Wild Knight* contained a bloodthirsty poem about the Battle of Gibeon, written with strict adhesion to the spirit of the Old Testament. It might have been penned by a survivor, glutted with blood and duly grateful to the God of his race for the solar and lunar eccentricities which made possible the extermination of the five kings of the Amorites. In 1911 came *The Ballad of the White Horse*, which is all about Alfred, according to the popular traditions embodied in the elementary history books, and, in particular, the Battle of Ethandune. How Chesterton revels in that Homeric slaughter! The words blood and bloody punctuate the largest poem of G.K.C. to the virtual obliteration in our memory of the fine imagery, the occasional tendernesses, and the blustering aggressiveness of some of the metaphors and similes. Not many men would have the nerve, let alone the skill, to write :

> And in the last eclipse the sea
> Shall stand up like a tower,
> Above all moons made dark and riven,
> Hold up its foaming head in heaven,
> And laugh, knowing its hour.

But, at the same time, this poem contains very touching and beautiful lines. *The Ballad of*

the White Horse is an epic of the struggle between Christian and Pagan. One of the essentials of an epic is that its men should be decent men, if they cannot be heroes. The Iliad would have been impossible if it had occurred to Homer to introduce the Government contractors to the belligerent powers. All the point would have gone out of Orlando Furioso if it had been the case that the madness of Orlando was the delirium tremens of an habitual drunkard. Chesterton recognizing this truth makes the pagans of the *White Horse* behave like gentlemen. There is a beautiful little song put into the mouth of one of them, which is in its way a perfect expression of the inadequacy of false gods.

There is always a thing forgotten
  When all the world goes well ;
A thing forgotten, as long ago
When the gods forgot the mistletoe,
And soundless as an arrow of snow
  The arrow of anguish fell.

The thing on the blind side of the heart,
  On the wrong side of the door,
The green plant groweth, menacing
Almighty lovers in the spring ;
There is always a forgotten thing,
  And love is not secure.

The sorrow behind these lines is more mov-

ing, because more sincere, than the lines of that over-quoted verse of Swinburne's :

> From too much love of living,
> From hope and fear set free,
> We thank with brief thanksgiving
> Whatever gods there be—
> That no life lives for ever,
> That dead men rise up never,
> That even the weariest river
> Winds somewhere safe to sea.

This is insincere, because a pagan (as Swinburne was) could have committed suicide had he really felt these things. Swinburne, like most modern pagans, really hated priesteraft when he thought he was hating God. Chesterton's note is truer. He knows that the pagan has all the good things of life but one, and that only an exceptionally nice pagan knows he lacks that much.

And so one might go on mining the *White Horse*, for it contains most things, as a good epic should. Two short stanzas, however, should be quoted, whatever else is omitted, for the sake of their essential Christianity, their claim that a man may make a fool of himself for Christ's sake, whatever the bishops have to say about it.

> The men of the East may spell the stars,
> And times and triumphs mark,
> But the men signed of the Cross of Christ
> Go gaily in the dark.

The men of the East may search the scrolls
For sure fates and fame,
But the men that drink the blood of God
Go singing to their shame.

In his last volume of *Poems* (1915) Chesterton presents us with a varied collection of works, written at any time during the last twelve or so years. The pugnacious element is present in *Lepanto*, through the staccato syllables of which we hear drum-taps and men cheering. There is a temptation to treat *Lepanto*, and indeed most of Chesterton's poems, with special reference to their technique, but we must resist this temptation, with tears if need be, and with prayer, for to give way to it would be to commit a form of vivisection. G.K.C. is not a text, praise be, and whether he lives or dies, long may he be spared the hands of an editor or interpreter who is also an irrepressible authority on anapaests and suchlike things. He is a poet, and a considerable poet, not because of his strict attention to the rules of prosody, but because he cannot help himself, and the rules in question are for the persons who can, the poets by deliberate intention, the writers who polish unceasingly. Chesterton has more impulse than finish, but he has natural gifts of rhythm and the effective use of words which more or

less (according to the reader's taste) compensate for his refusal or his incapacity to take pains.

Finally there are the religious poems. From these we can best judge the reality of Chesterton's poetic impulse, for here, knowing that affectation would be almost indecent, he has expressed what he had to express with a care denied to most of his other works. In one of his essays, G.K.C. exults in that matchless phrase of Vaughan, " high humility." He has both adopted and adapted this quality, and the results are wonderful. In *The Wise Men* occurs this stanza :

> The Child that was ere worlds begun
> (. . . We need but walk a little way,
> We need but see a latch undone . . .)
> The Child that played with moon and sun
> Is playing with a little hay.

The superb antithesis leaves one struggling against that involuntary little gasp which is a reader's first tribute to a fine thought. He could be a great hymn writer, if he would. One of his poems, in fact, has found its way into The English Hymnal, where it competes (if one may use the word of a sacred song) with Recessional for the favour of congregations. If we take a glance at a few of the finest hymns, we shall find that they share certain

obvious qualities : bold imagery, the vocabulary of conflict, an attitude of humility that is very nearly also one of great pride, and certain tricks of style. And when we look through Chesterton's poems generally, we shall find that these are exactly the qualities they possess.

VI

THE RELIGION OF A DEBATER

In his book on William Blake, Chesterton says that he is "personally quite convinced that if every human being lived a thousand years, every human being would end up either in utter pessimistic scepticism or in the Catholic creed." In course of time, in fact, everybody would have to decide whether they preferred to be an intellectualist or a mystic. A debauch of intellectualism, lasting perhaps nine hundred and fifty years, is a truly terrible thing to contemplate. Perhaps it is safest to assert that if our lives were considerably lengthened, there would be more mystics and more madmen.

To Chesterton modern thought is merely the polite description of a noisy crowd of persons proclaiming that something or other is wrong. Mr. Bernard Shaw denounces meat and has been understood to denounce marriage. Ibsen is said to have anathematized almost

everything (by those who have not read his works). Mr. MacCabe and Mr. Blatchford think that, on the whole, there is no God, and Tolstoy told us that nearly everything we did, and quite all we wanted to do, was opposed to the spirit of Christ's teaching. Auberon Herbert disapproved of law, and John Davidson disapproved of life. Herbert Spencer objected to government, Passive Resisters to State education, and various educational reformers to education of any description. There are people who would abolish our spelling, our clothing, our food and, most emphatically, our drink. Mr. H. G. Wells adds the finishing touch to this volume of denials, by blandly suggesting in an appendix to his Modern Utopia, headed "Scepticism of the Instrument," that our senses are so liable to err, that we can never be really sure of anything at all. This spirit of denial is extraordinarily infectious. A man begins to suspect what he calls the "supernatural." He joins an ethical society, and before he knows where he is, he is a vegetarian. The rebellious moderns have a curious tendency to flock together in self-defence, even when they have nothing in common. The mere aggregation of denials rather attracts the slovenly and the unattached. The lack of positive dogma expressed by such a coalition

encourages the sceptic and the uneducated, who do not realize that the deliberate suppression of dogma is itself a dogma of extreme arrogance. We trust too much to the label, nowadays, and the brief descriptions we attach to ourselves have a gradually increasing connotation. In politics for example, the conservative creed, which originally contained the single article that aristocracy, wealth and government should be in the same few hands, now also implies adhesion to the economic doctrine of protection, and the political doctrine that unitary government is preferable to federal. The liberal creed, based principally upon opposition to the conservative, and to a lesser degree upon disrespect for the Established Church, has been enlarged concurrently with the latter. The average liberal or conservative now feels himself in honour bound to assert or to deny political dogmas out of sheer loyalty to his party. This does not make for sanity. The only political creed in which a man may reasonably expect to remain sane is Socialism, which is catholic and not the least dependent upon other beliefs. Apart from the inconsiderable number of Socialists, the average politician follows in the footsteps of those gentlemen already mentioned. He is not allowed to believe, so he contents himself

with a denial of the other side's promises. Assertion is infinitely more brain-wearing than denial.

Side by side with the increase in those who deny is a growth in the numbers of those who come to regard apathy, suspended judgment, or a lack of interest in a religious matter as a state of positive belief. There are agnostics quite literally all over the place. Belief peters down into acceptance, acceptance becomes a probability, a probability declines into a reasonable doubt, and a reasonable doubt drifts into "it is highly conjectural and indeed extremely unlikely," or something of that sort. Tolerance was once an instrument for ensuring that truth should not be suppressed; it is now an excuse for refusing to bother. There is, in fact, a growing disrespect for truth. A great many men went to the stake years ago rather than admit the possibility that they were wrong; they protested, so far as human endurance allowed them to protest, that they were orthodox and that their persecutors, and not they, were the heretics. To-day a bunch of Cambridge men calls itself "The Heretics" and imagines it has found a clever title. At the same time there is an apparent decline in the power to believe. The average politician (the principal type of twentieth-century propa-

gandist) hardly ever makes a speech which does not contain one at least of the following phrases :

"I may be mistaken, but it seems to me that . . ."

"We are all subject to correction, but as far as we know . . ."

"In this necessarily imperfect world . . ."

"So far as one is able to judge . . ."

"Appearances are notoriously deceptive, but . . ."

"Human experience is necessarily limited to . . ."

"We can never be really sure . . ."

"Pilate asked, 'What is truth?' Ah, my brethren, what indeed?"

"The best minds of the country have failed to come to an agreement on this question; one can only surmise . . ."

"Art is long and life is short. Art to-day is even longer than it used to be."

Now the politician, to do him justice, has retained the courage of his convictions to a greater extent than the orthodox believer in God. Men are still prepared to make Home Rule the occasion of bloodshed, or to spend the midnight hours denouncing apparent politi-

cal heresies. But whereas the politician, like the orthodox believer once pronounced apologetics, they now merely utter apologies. To-day, equipped as never before with the heavy artillery of argument in the shape of Higher Criticism, research, blue-books, statistics, cheap publications, free libraries, accessible information, public lectures, and goodness only knows what else, the fighting forces of the spiritual and temporal decencies lie drowsing as in a club-room, placarded "Religion and politics must not be discussed here."

All this, with the exception of the political references, is a summary of Chesterton's claim that a return to orthodoxy is desirable and necessary. It will be found at length in *Heretics* and in the first chapters of *Orthodoxy*, and sprinkled throughout all his writings of a later date than 1906 or so. He protests on more than one occasion against Mr. Shaw's epigram, which seems to him to contain the essence of all that is wrong to-day, "The golden rule is that there is no golden rule." Chesterton insists that there is a golden rule, that it is a very old one, and that it is known to a great many people, most of whom belong to the working classes.

In his argument that, on the whole, the masses are (or were) right about religion, and

that the intellectuals are wrong, Chesterton is undoubtedly at his most bellicose and his sincerest. His is the pugnacity that prefers to pull down another's banner rather than to raise his own. His "defences" in *The Defendant*, and the six hundred odd cases made out by him in the columns of The Daily News are largely and obviously inspired by the wish, metaphorically speaking, to punch somebody's head. The fact that he is not a mere bully appears in the appeal to common decency which Chesterton would be incapable of omitting from an article. Nevertheless he prefers attack to defence. In war, the offensive is infinitely more costly than the defensive. But in controversy this is reversed. The opener of a debate is in a much more difficult position than his opponent. The latter need only criticize the former's case; he is not compelled to disclose his own defences. Chesterton used to have a grand time hoisting people on their own petards, and letting forth strings of epigrams at the expense of those from whom he differed, and only incidentally revealing his own position. Then, as he tells us in the preface to *Orthodoxy*, when he had published the saltatory series of indictments entitled *Heretics*, a number of his critics said, in effect, "Please, Mr. Chesterton, what are

we to believe ?" Mr. G. S. Street, in particular, begged for enlightenment. G.K.C. joyously accepted the invitation, and wrote *Orthodoxy*, his most brilliant book.

There are few works in the English language the brilliancy of which is so sustained. *Orthodoxy* is a rapid torrent of epigrammatically expressed arguments. Chesterton's method in writing it is that of the digger wasp. This intelligent creature carries on the survival of the fittest controversy by paralyzing its opponent first, and then proceeding to lay the eggs from which future fitness will proceed in the unresisting but still living body. Chesterton begins by paralyzing his reader, by savagely attacking all the beliefs which the latter, if he be a modern and a sceptic, probably regards as first principles. Tolerance is dismissed, as we have just seen, as a mere excuse for not caring. Reason, that awful French goddess, is shown to be another apology. Nietzsche and various other authors to whom some of us have bent the knee are slaughtered without misery. Then Chesterton proceeds to the argument, the reader being by this time receptive enough to swallow a camel, on the sole condition that G.K.C. has previously slightly treacled the animal.

Perhaps it would be more accurate to assert

that at this point Chesterton pretends to begin his argument. As a matter of strict fact he only describes his adventures in Fairyland, which is all the earth. He tells us of his profound astonishment at the consistent recurrence of apples on apple trees, and at the general jolliness of the earth. He describes, very beautifully, some of the sensations of childhood making the all-embracing discovery that things are what they seem, and the even more joyful feeling of pretending that they are not, or that they will cease to be at any moment. A young kitten will watch a large cushion, which to it is a very considerable portion of the universe, flying at it without indicating any very appreciable surprise. A child, in the same way, would not be surprised if his house suddenly developed wings and flew away. Chesterton cultivated this attitude of always expecting to be surprised by the most natural things in the world, until it became an obsession, and a part of his journalistic equipment. In a sense Chesterton is the everlasting boy, the Undergraduate Who Would Not Grow Up. There must be few normally imaginative town-bred children to whom the pointed upright area-railings do not appear an unsearchable armoury of spears or as walls of protective flames, temporarily frozen

black so that people should be able to enter and leave their house. Every child knows that the old Norse story of a sleeping Brunnhilde encircled by flames is true; to him or her, there is a Brunnhilde in every street, and the child knows that there it always has a chance of being the chosen Siegfried. But because this view of life is so much cosier than that of the grown-ups, Chesterton clings to his childhood's neat little universe and weeps pathetically when anybody mentions Herbert Spencer, and makes faces when he hears the word Newton. He insists on a fair dole of surprises. "Children are grateful when Santa Claus puts in their stockings gifts of toys and sweets. Could I not be grateful to Santa Claus when he put in my stockings the gift of two miraculous legs?"

Now this fairyland business is frankly overdone. Chesterton conceives of God, having carried the Creation as far as this world, sitting down to look at the new universe in a sort of ecstasy. "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold it was very good." He enjoyed His new toy immensely, and as He sent the earth spinning round the sun, His pleasure increased. So He said "Do it again" every time the sun had completed its course, and laughed prodigiously, and behaved like a

happy child. And so He has gone on to this day saying "Do it again" to the sun and the moon and the stars, to the animal creation, and the trees, and every living thing. So Chesterton pictures God, giving His name to what others, including Christians, call natural law, or the laws of God, or the laws of gravitation, conservation of energy, and so on, but always laws. For which reason, one is compelled to assume that in his opinion God is now [1915] saying to Himself, "There's another bloody war, do it again, sun," and gurgling with delight. It is dangerous to wander in fairyland, as Chesterton has himself demonstrated, "one might meet a fairy." It is not safe to try to look God in the face. A prophet in Israel saw the glory of Jehovah, and though He was but the God of a small nation, the prophet's face shone, and, so great was the vitality he absorbed from the great Source that he "was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." That is the reverent Hebrew manner of conveying the glory of God. But Chesterton, cheerfully playing toss halfpenny among the fairies, sees an idiot child, and calls it God.

Fortunately for the argument, Chesterton has no more to say about his excursion in

Fairyland after his return. He goes on to talk about the substitutes which people have invented for Christianity. The Inner Light theory has vitriol sprayed upon it. Marcus Aurelius, it is explained, acted according to the Inner Light. "He gets up early in the morning, just as our own aristocrats leading the Simple Life get up early in the morning; because such altruism is much easier than stopping the games in the amphitheatre or giving the English people back their land." The present writer does not profess any ability to handle philosophic problems philosophically; it seems to him, however, that if Chesterton had been writing a few years later, he would have attempted to extinguish the latest form of the Inner Light, that "intuition" which has been so much associated with M. Bergson's teachings.

The Inner Light is finally polished off as follows:

> Of all conceivable forms of enlightenment the worst is what these people call the Inner Light. Of all horrible religions the most horrible is the worship of the god within. Any one who knows anybody knows how it would work; anybody who knows any one from the Higher Thought Centre knows how it does work. That Jones should worship the god within him turns out ultimately to mean that Jones shall worship Jones. . . . Christianity came into the

world firstly in order to assert with violence that a man has not only to look inwards, but to look outwards, to behold with astonishment and enthusiasm a divine company and a divine captain.

Continuing his spiritual autobiography, Chesterton describes his gradual emergence from the wonted agnosticism of sixteen through the mediumship of agnostic literature. Once again that remark of Bacon's showed itself to be true, "A little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion." A man may read Huxley and Bradlaugh, who knew their minds, and call himself an agnostic. But when it comes to reading their followers, there's another story to tell. What especially struck Chesterton was the wholesale self-contradictoriness of the literature of agnosticism. One man would say that Christianity was so harmful that extermination was the least that could be desired for it, and another would insist that it had reached a harmless and doddering old age. A writer would assert that Christianity was a religion of wrath and blood, and would point to the Inquisition, and to the religious wars which have at one time or another swept over the civilized world. But by the time the reader's blood was up, he would come across some virile atheist's pro-

clamation of the feeble, mattoid character of the religion in question, as illustrated by its quietist saints, the Quakers, the Tolstoyans, and non-resisters in general. When he had cooled down, he would run into a denunciation of the asceticism of Christianity, the monastic system, hair-shirts, and so on. Then he would come across a sweeping condemnation of its sensual luxuriousness, its bejewelled chalices, its pompous rituals, the extravagance of its archbishops, and the like. Christianity "was abused for being too plain and for being too coloured." And then the sudden obvious truth burst upon Chesterton, What if Christianity was the happy mean?

Perhaps, after all, it is Christianity that is sane and all its critics that are mad—in various ways. I tested this idea by asking myself whether there was about any of the accusers anything morbid that might explain the accusation. I was startled to find that this key fitted a lock. For instance, it was certainly odd that the modern world charged Christianity at once with bodily austerity and with artistic pomp. But then it was also odd, very odd, that the modern world itself combined extreme bodily luxury with an extreme absence of artistic pomp. The modern man thought Becket's robes too rich and his meals too poor. But then the modern man was really exceptional in history. No man before ever ate such elaborate dinners in such ugly clothes. The modern man found the church too simple exactly where

modern life is too complex; he found the church too gorgeous exactly where modern life is too dingy. The man who disliked the plain fasts and feasts was mad on *entrées*. The man who disliked vestments wore a pair of preposterous trousers. And surely if there was any insanity involved in the matter at all it was in the trousers, not in the simply falling robe. If there was any insanity at all, it was in the extravagant *entrées*, not in the bread and wine.

Nevertheless, Christianity was centrifugal rather than centripetal; it was not a mere average, but a centre of gravity; not a compromise, but a conflict. Christ was not half-God and half-man, like Hercules, but "perfect God and perfect man." Man was not only the highest, but also the lowest. "The Church was positive on both points. One can hardly think too little of one's self. One can hardly think too much of one's soul."

At this point agreement with Mr. Chesterton becomes difficult. Christianity, he tells us, comes in with a flaming sword and performs neat acts of bisection. It separates the sinner from the sin, and tells us to love the former and hate the latter. He also tells us that no pagan would have thought of this. Leaving aside the question whether or not Plato was a Christian, it may be pointed out that whereas Chesterton condemns Tolstoyanism whenever he recognizes it, he here proclaims Tolstoy's

doctrine. On the whole, however, the mild perverseness of the chapter on *The Paradoxes of Christianity* leaves its major implications safe. It does not matter greatly whether we prefer to regard Christianity as a centre of gravity, or a point of balance. We need only pause to note Chesterton personifies this dualism. *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* is the arrangement of little bits of iron—the inhabitants of London, in this case—around the two poles of a fantastic magnet, of which one is Adam Wayne, the fanatic, and the other, Auberon Quin, the humorist. In *The Ball and the Cross* the diagram is repeated. James Turnbull, the atheist, and Evan MacIan, the believer, are the two poles. We speak in a loose sort of way of opposite poles when we wish to express separation. But, in point of fact, they symbolize connection far more exactly. They are absolutely interdependent. The whole essence of a North and a South Pole is that we, knowing where one is, should be able to say where the other is. Nobody has ever suggested a universe in which the North Pole wandered about at large. This is the idea which Chesterton seems to have captured and introduced into his definition of Christianity.

Democracy, to Chesterton, is the theory

that one man is as good as another; Christianity, he finds, is the virtual sanctification by supernatural authority of democracy. He points out the incompatibility of political democracy, for example, with the determinism to which Mr. Blatchford's logical atheism has brought him. If man is the creature of his heredity and his environment, as Mr. Blatchford asserts, and if a slum-bred heredity and a slum environment do not make for high intelligence, then obviously it is against the best interests of the State to allow the slum inhabitant to vote. On the other hand, it is entirely to the best interests of the State to entrust its affairs to the aristocracy, whose breeding and environment gives it an enormous amount of intelligence. Christianity, by proclaiming that every man's body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, insists both upon the necessity of abolishing the slums and of honouring the slum-dwellers as sharers with the rest of humanity in a common sonship. This is the case for Socialism, it may be pointed out parenthetically, and Chesterton has let it slip past him. He insists that orthodoxy is the best conceivable guardian of liberty, for the somewhat far-fetched reason that no believer in miracles would have such "a deep and sincere faith in the incurable routine

of the cosmos " as to cling to the theory that men should not have the liberty to work changes. If a man believed in the freedom of God, in fact, he would have to believe in the freedom of man. The obvious answer to which is that he generally doesn't. Christianity made for eternal vigilance, Chesterton maintains, whereas Buddhism kept its eye on the Inner Light—which means, in fact, kept it shut. In proof, or at least in confirmation of this, he points to the statues of Christian saints and of the Buddha. The former keep their eyes open wide, the latter keep their eyes firmly closed. Vigilance, however, does not always make for liberty—the vigilance of the Inquisition, for example. Leaving out of account this and other monstrous exceptions, we might say spiritual liberty, perhaps, but not political liberty, not, at any rate, since the days of Macchiavelli, and the divorce of Church and State.

By insisting specially on the immanence of God we get introspection, self-isolation, quietism, social indifference—Tibet. By insisting specially on the transcendence of God we get wonder, curiosity, moral and political adventure, religious indignation—Christendom. Insisting that God is inside man, man is always inside himself. By insisting that God transcends man, man has transcended himself.

In concluding the book, Chesterton joyously refutes a few anti-Christian arguments by means of his extraordinary knack of seeing the large and obvious, and therefore generally overlooked things. He believes in Christianity because he is a rationalist, and the evidence in its favour has convinced him. The arguments with which he deals are these. That men are much like beasts, and probably related to them. Answer: yes, but men are also quite wonderfully unlike them in many important respects. That primeval religion arose in ignorance and fear. Answer: we know nothing about prehistoric man, because he was prehistoric, therefore we cannot say where he got his religion from. But "the whole human race has a tradition of the Fall." And so on: the argument that Christ was a poor sheepish and ineffectual professor of a quiet life is answered by the flaming energy of His earthly mission; the suggestion that Christianity belongs to the Dark Ages is countered by the historical fact that it "was the one path across the Dark Ages that was not dark." It was the path that led from Roman to modern civilization, and we are here because of it. And the book ends with a peroration that might be likened to a torrent, were it not for the fact that

torrents are generally narrow and shallow. It is a most remarkable exhibition of energy, a case from which flippancies and irrelevancies have been removed, and where the central conviction advances irresistibly. Elsewhere in the book Chesterton had been inconsequent, darting from point to point, lunging at an opponent one moment, formulating a theory in the next, and producing an effect which, if judged by sample, would be considered bizarre and undirected. The book contains a few perversities, of course. The author attempts to rebut the idea "that priests have blighted societies with bitterness and gloom," by pointing out that in one or two priest-ridden countries wine and song and dance abound. Yes, but if people are jollier in France and Spain and Italy than in savage Africa, it is due not to the priests so much as to the climate which makes wine cheap and an open-air life possible. No amount of priests would be able to set the inhabitants of the Belgian Congo dancing around a maypole singing the while glad songs handed down by their fathers. No amount of priests would be able to make the festive Eskimo bask in the sun and sing in chorus when there wasn't any sun and it was altogether too cold to open their mouths wide in the open air. In fact the

priests are not the cause of the blight where it exists, just as they are not the cause of the jolliness, when there is any. But *Orthodoxy* is Chesterton's sincerest book. It is perhaps the only one of the whole lot in the course of which he would not be justified in repeating a remark which begins one of the *Tremendous Trifles*, " Every now and then I have introduced into my essays an element of truth."

Twice upon a time there was a Samuel Butler who wrote exhilaratingly and died and left the paradoxical contents of his notebooks to be published by posterity. The first (i.e. of Hudibras, not of Erewhon) had many lively things to say on the question of orthodoxy, being the forerunner of G.K.C. And I am greatly tempted to treat Samuel Butler as an ancestor to be described at length. Chesterton might well have said, " It is a dangerous thing to be too inquisitive, and search too narrowly into a true Religion, for 50,000 Bethshemites were destroyed only for looking into the Ark of the Covenant, and ten times as many have been ruined for looking too curiously into that Booke in which that Story is recorded "—in fact in *Magic* he very nearly did say the same thing. He would have liked (as who would not ?) to have been the author of the saying that " Repentant Teares are the waters upon which

the Spirit of God moves," or that "There is no better Argument to prove that the Scriptures were written by Divine Inspiration, than that excellent saying of our Savior, If any man will go to Law with thee for thy cloke, give him thy Coate also." He might well have written dozens of those puns and aphorisms of Butler which an unkind fate has omitted from the things we read, and even from the things we quote. But Butler provides an answer to Chesterton, for he was an intelligent anticipator who foresaw exactly what would happen when orthodoxy, which is to say the injunction to shout with the larger crowd, should be proclaimed as the easiest way out of religious difficulties. Before a reader has finally made up his mind on *Orthodoxy* (and it is highly desirable that he should do so), let him consider two little texts:

"They that profess Religion and believe it consists in frequenting of Sermons, do, as if they should say They have a great desire to serve God, but would faine be perswaded to it. Why should any man suppose that he pleases God by patiently hearing an Ignorant fellow render Religion ridiculous?"

"He [a Catholic] prefers his Church merely for the Antiquity of it, and cares not how

sound or rotten it be, so it be but old. He takes a liking to it as some do to old Cheese, only for the blue Rottenness of it. If he had lived in the primitive Times he had never been a *Christian;* for the Antiquity of the *Pagan* and *Jewish* Religion would have had the same Power over him against the *Christian*, as the old *Roman* has against the modern Reformation."

Here we leave Samuel Butler. The majority stands the largest chance of being right through the sheer operation of the law of averages. But somehow one does not easily imagine a mob passing through the gate that is narrow and the way that is narrow. One prefers to think of men going up in ones and twos, perhaps even in loneliness, and rejoicing at the strange miracle of judgment that all their friends should be assembled at the journey's end.

But the final criticism of Chesterton's *Orthodoxy* is that it is not orthodox. He claims that he is " concerned only to discuss . . . the central Christian theology (sufficiently summarized in the Apostles' Creed) " and, " When the word ' orthodoxy ' is used here it means the Apostles' Creed, as understood by everybody calling himself Christian until a very short time ago and the general historic con-

duct of those who held such a creed." In other words he counts as orthodox Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Russians, Nonconformists, Lutherans, Calvinists, and all manner of queer fish, possibly Joanna Southcott, Mrs. Annie Besant, and Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy. He might even, by stretching a point or two (which is surely permissible by the rules of their game), rope in the New Theologians. Now this may be evidence of extraordinary catholicity, but not of orthodoxy. Chesterton stands by and applauds the Homoousians scalping the Homoiousians, but he is apparently willing to leave the Anglican and the Roman Catholic on the same plane of orthodoxy, which is absurd. We cannot all be right, even the Duke in *Magic* would not be mad enough to assert that. And the average Christian would absolutely refuse his adherence to a statement of orthodoxy that left the matter of supreme spiritual authority an open question.

In the fifteenth century practically every Englishman would have declared with some emphasis that it lay in the Pope of Rome. In the twentieth century practically every Englishman would declare with equal emphasis that it did not. This change of opinion was accompanied by considerable ill-feeling on both sides, and was, as it were, illuminated by

burning martyrs. The men of both parties burned in both an active and a passive sense. Those charming Tudor sisters, Bloody Mary (as the Anglicans call her) and Bloody Bess (as the Roman Catholics affectionately name her) left a large smudge upon accepted ideas of orthodoxy; charred human flesh was a principal constituent of it. The mark remains, the differences are far greater, but, to Chesterton, both Anglican and Roman Catholic are "orthodox." Of such is the illimitable orthodoxy of an ethical society, or of a body of Theosophists who "recognize the essential unity of all creeds and religions"—the liars! Chesterton tells us that Messrs. Shaw, Kipling, Wells, Ibsen and others are heretics, because of their doctrines. But he gives us no idea whether the Pope of Rome, who sells indulgences, is a heretic. And as the Pope is likely to outlive Messrs. Shaw, etc., by perhaps a thousand years, it is possible that Chesterton has been attacking the ephemeral heresies, while leaving the major ones untouched. In effect, Chesterton tells us no more than that we should shout with the largest crowd. But the largest crowd prefers, just now, not to do anything so clamorous.

The most curious feature about the present position of Christianity is the energy with

which its opponents combine to keep it going. While Mr. Robert Blatchford continues to argue that man's will is not free, and Sir Oliver Lodge continues to maintain that it is, the Doctrine of the Resurrection is safe; it is not even attacked. But the net result of all those peculiar modern things called "movements" is a state of immobility like a nicely balanced tug-of-war. Perhaps a Rugby scrum would make a better comparison.

The great and grave changes in our political civilization all belong to the early nineteenth century, not to the later. They belong to the black-and-white epoch, when men believed fixedly in Toryism, in Protestantism, in Calvinism, in Reform, and not infrequently in Revolution. And whatever each man believed in, he hammered at steadily, without scepticism: and there was a time when the Established Church might have fallen, and the House of Lords nearly fell. It was because Radicals were wise enough to be constant and consistent; it was because Radicals were wise enough to be conservative. . . . Let beliefs fade fast and frequently if you wish institutions to remain the same. The more the life of the mind is unhinged, the more the machinery of matter will be left to itself. The net result of all our political suggestions, Collectivism, Tolstoyanism, Neo-Feudalism, Communism, Anarchy, Scientific Bureaucracy—the plain fruit of them all is that Monarchy and the House of Lords will remain. The net result of all the new religions will be that the Church of England

will not (for heaven knows how long) be disestablished. It was Karl Marx, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Cunninghame Graham, Bernard Shaw, and Auberon Herbert, who between them, with bowed, gigantic backs, bore up the throne of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

It is on these grounds that we must believe that, even as the Church survives, and prevails, in order to get a hearing when the atheist and the New Theologian have finished shouting themselves hoarse at each other, so must political creeds be in conformity with the doctrines of the Church. Such is the foundation of democracy, according to Chesterton. Will anybody revise his political views on this basis? Probably not. Every Christian believes that his political opinions are thoroughly Christian, and so entire is the disrepute into which atheism has fallen as a philosophy of life, that a great many atheists likewise protest the entire Christianity of their politics. We are all democrats to-day, in one sense or another; each of us more loosely than his neighbour. It is strange that by the criterion of almost every living man who springs to the mind as a representative democrat, Chesterton is the most undemocratic of us all. This, however, needs a separate chapter of explanation.

VII

THE POLITICIAN WHO COULD NOT TELL THE TIME

SOMEWHERE at the back of all Chesterton's political and religious ideas lies an ideal country, a Utopia which actually existed. Its name is the Middle Ages. If some unemployed Higher Critic chose to undertake the appalling task of reading steadily through all the works of G.K.C., copying out those passages in which there was any reference to the Middle Ages, the result would be a description of a land flowing with milk and honey. The inhabitants would be large, strong Christian men, and red-haired, womanly women. Their children would be unschooled, save by the Church. They would all live in houses of their own, on lands belonging to them. Their faith would be one. They would speak Latin as a sort of Esperanto, and drink enormous quantities of good beer. The Church—but I have found the passage relating to the Church :

> Religion, the immortal maiden, has been a maid-of-all-work as well as a servant of mankind. She

provided men at once with the theoretic laws of an unalterable cosmos ; and also with the practical rules of the rapid and thrilling game of morality. She taught logic to the student and taught fairy tales to the children ; it was her business to confront the nameless gods whose fear is on all flesh, and also to see that the streets were spotted with silver and scarlet, that there was a day for wearing ribbons or an hour for ringing bells.

The inhabitants of this happy realm would be instinctively democratic, and no woman would demand a vote there. They would have that exalted notion of patriotism that works outwards from the village pump to the universe at large. They would understand all humanity because they understood themselves. They would understand themselves because they would have no newspapers to widen their interests and so make them shallower.

In *Magic*, as we have seen, Chesterton's mouthpiece, the Conjuror, gave us to understand that it was better to believe in Apollo than merely to disbelieve in God. The Chestertonian Middle Ages are like Apollo ; they did not exist, but they make an admirable myth. For Chesterton, in common with the rest of us, flourishes on myths like the green bay ; we, however, happen not to know, in most cases, when our myths have a foundation.

Mankind demands myths—and it has them. Some day a History of the World's Myths will be compiled. It will show humanity climbing perilous peaks in pursuit of somebody's misinterpretations of somebody else's books, or fighting bloodily because somebody asserted or denied that a nation was the chosen one, or invading new continents, physical or metaphysical, because of legendary gold to be found therein, or in fact committing all its follies under the inspiration of myths—as in fact it has done. The Middle Ages are to Chesterton what King Alfred was to the Chartists and early Radicals. They believed that in his days England was actually governed on Chartist principles. So it happens that two Radical papers of the early part of last century actually called themselves The Alfred, and that Major Cartwright spent a considerable amount of energy in inducing the Greeks to substitute pikes for bayonets in their struggles against the Turks, on the grounds that the pike was used in Alfred's England.

So there we have Chesterton believing devoutly that that servile state, stricken with plague, and afflicted with death in all its forms, is the dreamland of the saints. His political principles, roughly speaking, are England was decent once—let us apply the same recipe to

the England of to-day. His suggestions, therefore, are rather negative than positive. He would dam the flood of modern legislative tendencies because it is taking England farther away from his Middle Ages. But he will not say " do this " about anything, because in the Middle Ages they made few laws, not having, in point of fact, the power to enforce those offences against moral and economic law which then took the place of legislation.

It is impossible to say to what extent Chesterton has surrendered himself to this myth; whether he has come to accept it because he liked it, or in order to please his friend, Mr. Hilaire Belloc, from whom G.K.C. never differs politically. Once they stood side by side and debated against Mr. Shaw and Mr. Wells, arguing from Socialism to beer, and thence to religion.

In January, 1908, Chesterton accepted the invitation of the Editor of The New Age to explain why he did not call himself a Socialist, in spite of his claim to possess " not only a faith in democracy, but a great tenderness for revolution." The explanation is complicated, to say the least. In the first place Chesterton does not want people to share, they should give and take. In the second place, as a democrat (which nobody else is) he has a vast

respect (which nobody else has) for the working classes. And

one thing I should affirm as certain, the whole smell and sentiment and general ideal of Socialism they detest and disdain. No part of the community is so specially fixed in those forms and feelings which are opposite to the tone of most Socialists; the privacy of homes, the control of one's own children, the minding of one's own business. I look out of my back windows over the black stretch of Battersea, and I believe I could make up a sort of creed, a catalogue of maxims, which I am certain are believed, and believed strongly, by the overwhelming mass of men and women as far as the eye can reach. For instance, that an Englishman's house is his castle, and that awful proprieties ought to regulate admission to it; that marriage is a real bond, making jealousy and marital revenge at the least highly pardonable; that vegetarianism and all pitting of animal against human rights is a silly fad; that on the other hand to save money to give yourself a fine funeral is not a silly fad, but a symbol of ancestral self-respect; that when giving treats to friends or children, one should give them what they like, emphatically not what is good for them; that there is nothing illogical in being furious because Tommy has been coldly caned by a schoolmistress and then throwing saucepans at him yourself. All these things they believe; they are the only people who do believe them; and they are absolutely and eternally right. They are the ancient sanities of humanity; the ten commandments of man.

A week later, Mr. H. G. Wells, who at that time had not yet broken away from organized Socialism, but was actually a member of the Executive Committee of the Fabian Society, wrote a reply to the case against Socialism which had been stated by Chesterton, and, a week earlier, by Mr. Hilaire Belloc. He attempted to get Chesterton to look facts in the face. He pointed out that as things are "I do not see how Belloc and Chesterton can stand for anything but a strong State as against those wild monsters of property, the strong, big, private owners." Suppose that Chesterton isn't a Socialist, is he more on the side of the Socialists or on that of the Free Trade Liberal capitalists and landlords? "It isn't an adequate reply to say [of Socialism] that nobody stood treat there, and that the simple, generous people like to beat their own wives and children on occasion in a loving and intimate manner, and that they won't endure the spirit of Sidney Webb."

A fortnight later, Chesterton replied. But, though many have engaged with him in controversy, I doubt if anybody has ever pinned him down to a fact or an argument. On this occasion, G.K.C. politely refused even to refer to the vital point of the case of Mr. H. G. Wells. On the other hand he wrote a very

jolly article about beer and "tavern hospitality." The argument marked time for two weeks more, when Mr. Belloc once again entered the lists. The essence of his contribution is "I premise that man, in order to be normally happy, tolerably happy, must own." Collectivism will not let him own. The trouble about the present state of society is that people do not own enough. The remedy proposed will be worse than the disease. Then Mr. Bernard Shaw had a look in.

In the course of his lengthy article he gave "the Chesterbelloc"—"a very amusing pantomime elephant"—several shrewd digs in the ribs. It claimed, according to G.B.S., to be the Zeitgeist. "To which we reply, bluntly, but conclusively, 'Gammon!'" The rest was mostly amiable personalities. Mr. Shaw owned up to musical cravings, compared with which the Chesterbelloc tendency to consume alcohol was as nothing. He also jeered very pleasantly at Mr. Belloc's power to cause a stampede of Chesterton's political and religious ideas. "For Belloc's sake Chesterton says he believes literally in the Bible story of the Resurrection. For Belloc's sake he says he is not a Socialist. On a recent occasion I tried to drive him to swallow the Miracle of St. Januarius for Belloc's sake; but at that he stuck. He pleaded his

belief in the Resurrection story. He pointed out very justly that I believe in lots of things just as miraculous as the Miracle of St. Januarius; but when I remorselessly pressed the fact that he did not believe that the blood of St. Januarius reliquefies miraculously every year, the Credo stuck in his throat like Amen in Macbeth's. He had got down at last to his irreducible minimum of dogmatic incredulity, and could not, even with the mouth of the bottomless pit yawning before Belloc, utter the saving lie."

By this time the discussion was definitely off Socialism. Chesterton produced another article, *The Last of the Rationalists*, in reply to Mr. Shaw, from which one gathered what one had been previously suspected that "you [namely Mr. Shaw, but in practice both the opposition controversialists] have confined yourselves to charming essays on our two charming personalities." And there they stopped.

The year following this bout of personalities saw the publication of a remarkably brilliant book by Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw*, in which, one might have expected, the case against the political creed represented by G.B.S. might have been carried a trifle farther. Instead of which it was not carried anything

like so far. Chesterton jeered at Mr. Shaw's vegetarianism, denied his democracy, but decided that on the whole he was a good republican, " in the literal and Latin sense ; he cares more for the Public Thing than for any private thing." He ends the chapter entitled " The Progressive " by saying the kindest things he ever said about any body of Socialists.

> I have in my time had my fling at the Fabian Society, at the pedantry of schemes, the arrogance of experts ; nor do I regret it now. But when I remember that other world against which it reared its bourgeois banner of cleanliness and common sense, I will not end this chapter without doing it decent honour. Give me the drain pipes of the Fabians rather than the panpipes of the later poets ; the drain pipes have a nicer smell.

The reader may have grasped by this time the fact that Chesterton's objections to Socialism were based rather on his dislike of what the working man calls " mucking people about " than on any economic grounds. He made himself the sworn enemy of any Bill before Parliament which contained any proposals to appoint inspectors. He took the line that the sacredness of the home diminishes visibly with the entrance of the gas collector, and disappears down the kitchen sink with the arrival of the school attendance officer. In those of his

writings which I have not seen I have no doubt there are pleadings for the retention of the cesspool, because it is the last moat left to the Englishman's house, which is his castle. It is difficult to believe in the complete sincerity of such an attitude. The inspector is the chief enemy of the bad landlord and employer, he is a fruit of democracy. In the early days of the factory system, when mercilessly long hours were worked by children and women, when legislation had failed to ameliorate the conditions of employment, because the employers were also the magistrates, and would not enforce laws against themselves, the great Reform Bill agitation, which so nearly caused a revolution in this country, came to an end, having in 1832 achieved a partial success. But the new House of Commons did not at once realize how partial it was, and at first it regarded the interests of working men with something of the intensity of the Liberal Government of 1906, which had not yet come to appreciate the new and portentous Labour Party at its true worth. So in 1833 inspectors were appointed for the first time. This very brief excursion into history is sufficient justification for refusing to take seriously those who would have us believe that inspectors are necessarily the enemies of the human race.

Chesterton's theory that middle-class Socialists are people who want to do things to the poor in the direction of regimenting them finds an easy refutation. When, in 1910, the whole of England fell down before the eloquence of Mr. Lloyd George, and consented to the Insurance Bill, the one body of people who stood out and fought that Bill was that middle-class Socialist body, the Fabian Society. It is sometimes desirable, for purposes of controversy, to incarnate a theory or objection. Chesterton lumped together all his views on the alleged intentions of the Socialists to interfere in the natural and legitimate happinesses of the working class, and called this curious composite Mr. Sidney Webb. So through many volumes Mr. Webb's name is continually bobbing up, like an irrepressible Aunt Sally, and having to be thwacked into a temporary disappearance. But this is only done for literary effect. To heave a brick at a man is both simpler and more amusing than to arraign a system or a creed. A reader enjoys the feeling that his author is a clever dog who is making it devilishly uncomfortable for his opponents. His appreciation would be considerably less if the opponent in question was a mere theory. In point of fact, Chesterton is probably a warm admirer of Mr. and Mrs.

Sidney Webb. When they founded (in 1909) their National Committee for the Prevention of Destitution, designed to educate the British public in the ideas of what has been called Webbism, especially those contained in the Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission, one of the first to join was G. K. Chesterton.

The word Socialism covers a multitude of Socialists, some of whom are not. The political faith of a man, therefore, must not be judged upon his attitude towards Socialism, if we have anything more definite to go upon. Chesterton overflows, so to speak, with predilections, such as beer (in a political sense, of course), opposition to the Jingo, on the one hand, and to middle-class faddery, such as vegetarianism, on the other, and so on. Anybody might indulge in most of his views, in fact, without incurring severe moral reprobation. But there is an exception which, unfortunately, links Chesterton pretty firmly with the sweater, and other undesirable lords of creation. He is an anti-suffragist.

In a little essay Chesterton once wrote on Tolstoy, he argued that the thing that has driven men mad was logic, from the beginning of time, whereas the thing that has kept them sane was mysticism. Tolstoy, lacking mysticism, was at the mercy of his pitiless logic,

which led him to condemn things which are entirely natural and human. This attitude, one feels (and it is only to be arrived at by feeling), is absolutely right. We all start off with certain scarce expressible feelings that certain things are fundamentally decent and permissible, and that others are the reverse, just as we do not take our idea of blackness and whiteness from a text-book. If anybody proposed that all Scotsmen should be compelled to eat sago with every meal, the idea, although novel to most of us, would be instantly dismissed, even, it is probable, by those with sago interests, because it would be contrary to our instinct of what is decent. In fact, we all believe in natural rights, or at any rate we claim the enjoyment of some. Now natural rights have no logical basis. The late Professor D. G. Ritchie very brilliantly examined the theory of natural rights, and by means of much subtle dissection and argument found that there were no natural rights; law was the only basis of privilege. It is quite easy to be convinced by the author's delightful dialectic, but the conviction is apt to vanish suddenly in the presence of a dog being ill-treated.

Now on a basis of common decency—the basis of all democratic political thought—the

case for woman suffrage is irresistible. It is not decent that the sweated woman worker should be denied what, in the opinion of many competent judges, might be the instrument of her salvation. It is not decent that women should share a disqualification with lunatics, criminals, children, and no others of their own race. It is not decent that the sex which knows most about babies should have no opportunity to influence directly legislation dealing with babies. It is not decent that a large, important and necessary section of humanity, with highly gregarious instincts, should not be allowed to exercise the only gregarious function which concerns the whole nation at once.

These propositions are fundamental; if a man or woman cannot accept them, then he is at heart an "anti," even if he has constructed for himself a quantity of reasons, religious, ethical, economic, political or what not, why women should be allowed to vote. Every suffrage argument is, or can be, based on decencies, not on emotion or statistics.

Chesterton bases his case on decencies, but they are not the decencies that matter. In *What's Wrong with the World* he insists on the indecency of allowing women to cease to be amateurs within the home, or of allowing them to earn a living in a factory or office, or of

allowing them to share in the responsibility for taking the lives of condemned murderers, or of allowing them to exercise the coercion which is government, which is a sort of pyramid, with a gallows on top, the ultimate resort of coercive power. And in these alleged indecencies (the word is not altogether my own) lies Chesterton's whole case against allowing any woman to vote. Into these propositions his whole case, as expressed in *What's Wrong with the World*, is faithfully condensed.

Well now, are these indecencies sincere or simulated? First, as regards the amateur. Chesterton's case is that the amateur is necessary, in order to counteract the influences of the specialist. Man is nowadays the specialist. He is confined to making such things as the thousandth part of a motor-car or producing the ten-thousandth part of a daily newspaper. By being a specialist he is made narrow. Woman, with the whole home on her hands, has a multiplicity of tasks. She is the amateur, and as such she is free. If she is put into politics or industry she becomes a specialist, and as such becomes a slave. This is a pretty piece of reasoning, but it is absolutely hollow. There are few women who do not gladly resign part at least of their sovereignty, if they have the chance, to a maid-servant (who may be,

and, in fact, usually is an amateur, but is not free to try daring experiments) or to such blatant specialists as cooks and nursemaids. Nobody is the least bit shocked by the existence of specialist women. Indeed, it is a solemn fact, that were it not for them Chesterton would be unable to procure a single article of clothing. He would be driven to the fig-leaf, and would stand a good chance of not getting even so much, now that so many gardeners are women. We are terribly dependent upon the specialist woman. That is why the amateur within the home is beginning to wonder whether, on the whole, man *is* so very much dependent upon her. She comes to rely more and more upon the specialist women to help her feed, clothe, and nurse her husband. She has so much done for her that she comes to understand the remainder left to her far better. She becomes a specialist herself, and feels kindly towards other specialists. Then she demands a vote and meets Chesterton, who tells her to go and mind the baby and be as free as she likes with the domestic apparatus for making pastry, when her baby is in point of fact being brought up by other women at a Montessori school to be much more intelligent and much more of a specialist than she herself is ever likely to be, and when she knows that

her dyspeptic husband has an absolute loathing for the amateurishness that expresses itself in dough.

Then there is the alleged wrongness of permitting women to work in factories and offices. We are all probably prepared to admit that we have been shocked at the commercial employment of women. But it has probably occurred to few of us that the shock was due simply to their commercial employment. It was due to their low wages and to the beastliness of their employers. When they drew decent wages and their employers were decent men we were not the least bit hurt. But when an employer made use of the amateurishness of young girls to underpay them, and then make deductions from their wages on various trivial pretexts, and put them to work in overcrowded factories and offices, then we all felt acutely that an indecency was being committed. The obvious democratic remedy is the duckpond, but in our great cities none remain. So one is sorrowfully brought round to the slower but surer expedient of attacking and destroying the amateurishness of women at the point where it is dangerous to them. Amateurishness has encircled women in the past like the seven rivers of Hades. Every now and again a daring excursion was made in

order that the wisdom of those imprisoned within should be added to our store. A good deal of aboriginal amateurishness has been evaporating as the woman doctor has been taking the place of the time-honoured amateur dispenser of brimstone and treacle, and even horrider things. And will Chesterton maintain that it were better for us all if certain women had remained amateurs and had not studied and specialized so that, in time of need, they were enabled to tend the sick and wounded at home, in Flanders and in France, and wherever the powers of evil had been at work ?

Lastly, is it decent that women should share the awful responsibility which is attached to the ultimate control of the State, when the State is compelled to use the gallows ? If women vote, they are responsible for whatever blood is shed by the State. Yes, but, Mr. Chesterton, aren't they just as responsible for it in any case ? Don't women help to pay the hangman's wages with every ounce of tea or of sweets they buy ? If capital punishment is obscene, then we can do without it, and a woman's vote will not make her a sharer in the evil. If capital punishment is morally stimulating to the nation at large, there is no reason why women should not be allowed to share in the stimulation. Now what has

become of Chesterton's decencies? It is indeed saddening that a man who never misses an opportunity to proclaim himself a democrat should take his stand on this matter beside Lord Curzon, and in opposition to the instinctively and essentially democratic views proclaimed by such men as Messrs. H. W. Nevinson and Philip Snowden.

In an article in The Illustrated London News on June 1st, 1912, Chesterton showed whose side he was on with unusual distinctness. The subject of the article was Earnestness; the moral, that it was a bad quality, the property of Socialists and Anti-Socialists, and Suffragists, and that apathy was best of all. It concluded:

> Neither Socialists nor Suffragists will smash our politics, I fear. The worst they can do is to put a little more of the poison of earnestness into the strong, unconscious sanity of our race, and disturb that deep and just indifference on which all things rest; the quiet of the mother or the carelessness of the child.

In remarkably similar words, the late Procurator of the Holy Synod of the Russian Church, C. P. Pobedonostsev, condemned democracy in his book, The Reflexions of a Russian Statesman, and praised *vis inertiæ* for its preservative effects. But the Russian had more consistency; he did not merely condemn

votes for women, but also votes for men ; and not only votes, but education, the jury system, the freedom of the Press, religious freedom, and many other things.

Putting aside the question of woman suffrage, Chesterton's views on democracy may be further illustrated by reference to the proceedings of the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and the House of Commons, 1909, on Stage Plays (Censorship). He may speak for himself here.

Mr. G. K. Chesterton is called in, and examined.

Question 6141(*Chairman*). I understand that you appear here to give evidence on behalf of the average man ?

G.K.C. Yes, that is so. I represent the audience, in fact. I am neither a dramatist nor a dramatic critic. I do not quite know why I am here, but if anybody wants to know my views on the subject they are these : I am for the censorship, but I am against the present Censor. I am very strongly for the censorship, and I am very strongly against the present Censor. The whole question I think turns on the old democratic objection to despotism. I am an old-fashioned person and I retain the old democratic objection to despotism. I would trust 12 ordinary men, but I cannot trust one ordinary man.

6142. You prefer the jury to the judge ?—Yes, exactly ; that is the very point. It seems to me that if you have one ordinary man judging, it is not

his ordinariness that appears, but it is his extra-ordinariness that appears. Take anybody you like—George III for instance. I suppose that George III was a pretty ordinary man in one sense. People called him Farmer George. He was very like a large number of other people, but when he was alone in his position things appeared in him that were not ordinary—that he was a German, and that he was mad, and various other facts. Therefore, my primary principle——

6143. He gloried in the name of Briton ?—I know he did. That is what showed him to be so thoroughly German.

Lord Newton. He spelt it wrongly.

Witness. Therefore, speaking broadly, I would not take George III's opinion, but I would take the opinion of 12 George III's on any question.

The taking of the "evidence" took several hours, but it never yielded anything more than this: The local jury is a better judge of what is right and proper than a single Censor. Juries may differ in their judgments; but why not? Is it not desirable that Hampstead and Highgate should each have an opportunity of finding out independently what they like? May they not compete in taste one against the other?

This introduction of the question of dramatic censorship invites a slight digression. Chesterton has a decided regard for a dramatic censor-

ship. A book need not be censored, because it need not be finished by its reader, but it may be difficult to get out of a theatre in the course of a performance. And there are performances of plays, written by "irresponsible modern philosophers," which, to Chesterton, seem to deserve suppression. A suggestive French farce may be a dirty joke, but it is at least a joke; but a play which raises the question Is marriage a failure? and answers it in the affirmative, is a pernicious philosophy. The answer to this last contention is that, in point of strict fact, modern philosophers do not regard happy marriages as failures, and opinion is divided on the others, which are generally the subjects of their plays. But there is no doubt that a jury is better qualified than a single Censor. A French jury decided that Madame Bovary was not immoral. An English jury decided that a certain book by Zola was immoral and sent the publisher to prison. Another English jury, for all practical purposes, decided that Dorian Gray was not immoral, and so on. The verdicts may be accepted. Twelve men, picked from an alphabetical list, may not be judges of art, but they will not debase morality.

Chesterton's personal contribution to the political thought of his day lies in his criticism

of the humaneness of legislative proposals. A thing that is human is commonly a very different matter from a thing that is merely humanitarian. G.K.C. is hotly human and almost bitterly anti-humanitarian.

The difference between the two is illustrated by the institution of the gallows, which is human, but not humanitarian. In its essentials it consists of a rope and a branch, which is precisely the apparatus that an angry man might employ in order to rid himself of his captured enemy. Herbert Spencer, seeking in his old age for means whereby to increase the happiness of mankind, invented a humanitarian apparatus for the infliction of capital punishment. It consisted of a glorified roundabout, on which the victim was laid for his last journey. As it revolved, the blood-pressure on his head gradually increased (or decreased, I forget which) until he fell asleep and died painlessly. This is humanitarianism. The process is safe and sure (so long as the machine did not stop suddenly), highly efficient, bloodless and painless. But just because it is so humanitarian it offends one a great deal more than the old-fashioned gallows. The only circumstance which can justify violence is anger. The only circumstance which can justify the taking of human life is anger. And

anger may be expressed by a rope or a knife-edge, but not by a roundabout or any other morbid invention of a cold-blooded philosopher such as the electric chair, or the lethal chamber. In the same way, if flogging is to continue as a punishment, it must be inflicted by a man and not by a machine.

Now this distinction (made without prejudice as to Chesterton's views on capital or corporal punishment) holds good through his whole criticism of modern legislation. He believes that it is better that a man and his family should starve in their own slum, than that they should be moulded, by a cumbersome apparatus of laws and officials and inspectors, into a tame, mildly prosperous and mildly healthy group of individuals, whose opinions, occupations and homes should be provided for them. On these lines he attacks whatever in his opinion will tend to put men into a position where their souls will be less their own. He believes that the man who has been costered by the Government into a mediocre state of life will be less of a man than one who has been left unbothered by officials, and has had to shift for himself.

Very largely, therefore, Chesterton's political faith is an up-to-date variety of the tenets of the Self-Help School, which was own brother

to the Manchester School. And here we come to a curious contradiction, the first of a series. For Chesterton loathes the Manchester School.

The contradiction comes of an inveterate nominalism. To G.K.C. all good politics are summed up in the words Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. But nobody, not even a Frenchman, can explain what they mean. Chesterton used to believe that they mean Liberalism, being led astray by the sound of the first word, but he soon realized his error. Let a man say "I believe in Liberty" and only the vagueness of the statement preserves it from the funniness of a Higher Thinker's affirmation, "I believe in Beauty." A man has to *feel* Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, for they are not in the nature of facts. And one suspects horribly that what Chesterton really feels is merely the masculine liberty, equality and fraternity of the public-house, where men meet together but never do anything. For Chesterton has not yet asked us to do anything, he only requests Parliament to refrain. He supports no political programme. He is opposed to Party Government, which is government by the Government. He is in favour of Home Rule, it may be inferred; and of making things nasty for the Jews, it may be supposed. But he does not poach on the leader-writers' pre-

serves, and his political programme is left hazy. His opposition to Liberal proposals brings him near the Tories. If the Liberals continue in power for a few years longer, and Home Rule drops out of the things opposed by Tories, the latter may well find Chesterton among their doubtful assets. He will probably continue to call himself a Liberal and a "child of the French Revolution," but that will be only his fun. For the interesting abortions to which the French Revolution gave birth—well, they are quite another story.

Chesterton is a warm supporter of the queerly mixed proposals that are known as the "rights of small nationalities," and the smaller the nationality, the more warmly he supports (so he would have us believe) its demand for self-government. Big fleas have little fleas, alas, and that is the difficulty he does not confront. For Home Rule carried to its final sub-division is simply home rule; the independence of homes. Political Home Rule is only assented to on general principles; apparently on the ground that on the day when an Englishman's home really does become his castle he will not, so to speak, mind much whether he is an Englishman or an Irishman.

And here we may bid farewell to the poli-

tician who is Chesterton. His politics are like his perverse definitions of the meaning of such words as progress and reform. He is like a child who plays about with the hands of a clock, and makes the surprising discovery that some clocks may be made to tell a time that does not exist—with the small hand at twelve and the large at six, for example. Also that if a clock goes fast, it comes to register an hour behind the true time, and the other way round. And so Chesterton goes on playing with the times, until at last a horrid suspicion grips us. What if he cannot tell the time himself ?

VIII

A DECADENT OF SORTS

An idea, if treated gently, may be brought up to perform many useful tasks. It is, however, apt to pine in solitude, and should be allowed to enjoy the company of others of its own kind. It is much easier to overwork an idea than a man, and of the two, the wearied idea presents an infinitely more pathetic appearance. Those of us who, for our sins, have to review the novels of other people, are accustomed to the saddening spectacle of a poor little idea, beautiful and fresh in its youth, come wearily to its tombstone on page 300 (where or whereabouts novels end), trailing after it an immense load of stiff and heavy puppets, taken down from the common property-cupboards of the nation's fiction, and not even dusted for the occasion. *Manalive*, as we have seen, suffered from its devotion to one single idea, but the poor little thing was kept going to the bitter end by the flow of humorous encouragement given it by the author. The later works of

Chesterton, however, are symbolized by a performing flea, dragging behind it a little cartload of passengers. But it sometimes happens that the humour of *Manalive* is not there, that one weary idea has to support an intolerable deal of prose.

In *An Essay on Two Cities*[1] there is a long passage illustrating the adventures of a man who tried to find people in London by the names of the places. He might go into Buckingham Palace in search of the Duke of Buckingham, into Marlborough House in quest of the Duke of Marlborough. He might even look for the Duke of Wellington at Waterloo.

> I wonder that no one has written a wild romance about the adventures of such an alien, seeking the great English aristocrats, and only guided by the names ; looking for the Duke of Bedford in the town of that name, seeking for some trace of the Duke of Norfolk in Norfolk. He might sail for Wellington in New Zealand to find the ancient seat of the Wellingtons. The last scene might show him trying to learn Welsh in order to converse with the Prince of Wales.

Here is an idea that is distinctly amusing when made to fill one short paragraph, and might be deadly tedious if extended into a wild romance. Perhaps the best way of summarizing the peculiar decadence into which Ches-

[1] *All Things Considered.*

terton seemed at one time to be falling is by the statement that up to the present he has not found time to write the book, but has done others like it. And yet the decadence has never showed signs of that *fin de siècle* rustiness that marked the decadent movement (if it was really a movement and not just an obsession) of the generation that preceded Chesterton. He cursed it in the dedication to Mr. E. C. Bentley of *The Man who was Thursday*, and he remained true to the point of view expressed in that curse for ever afterwards.

A cloud was on the mind of men, and wailing went the weather,
Yea, a sick cloud upon the soul, when we were boys together.
Science announced nonentity, and art admired decay ;
The world was old and ended : but you and I were gay.
Round us in antic order their crippled vices came—
Lust that had lost its laughter, fear that had lost its shame.
Like the white lock of Whistler, that lit our aimless gloom,
Men showed their own white feather as proudly as a plume.
Life was a fly that faded, and death a drone that stung ;
The world was very old indeed when you and I were young.
They twisted even decent sin to shapes not to be named :
Men were ashamed of honour ; but we were not ashamed.

The Chestertonian decadence was not even an all-round falling-off. If anybody were to

make the statement that in the year nineteen-hundred-and-something Chesterton produced his worst work it would be open to anybody else to declare, with equal truth, that in the same year Chesterton produced his best work. And the year in which these extremes met would be either 1913 or 1914, the years of *Father Brown* and *The Flying Inn* on one hand, and of *Father Brown* and some of the songs of *The Flying Inn* on the other. It was not a technical decline, but the period of certain intellectual wearinesses, when Chesterton's mental resilience failed him for a time, and he welcomed with too much enthusiasm the nasty ideas from which no man is wholly free.

The main feature indeed of this period of decadence is the brandishing about of a whole mass of antipathies. A man is perfectly entitled to hate what he will, but it is generally assumed that the hater has some ideas on the subject of the reform of the hatee. But Chesterton is as devoid of suggestions as a goat is of modesty. A man may have a violent objection against women earning their own livings, and yet be regarded as a reasonable being if he has any alternative proposals for the well-being of the unendowed and temporarily or permanently unmarriageable woman, with no relatives able to support her—and there

are two or three millions of such women in the United Kingdom. But a mere "You shouldn't" is neither here nor there.

Take this verse. It was written two or three years ago and is from a poem entitled *To a Turk.*

> With us too rage against the rood
> Your devils and your swine;
> A colder scorn of womanhood,
> A baser fear of wine,
> And lust without the harem,
> And Doom without the God,
> Go. It is not this rabble
> Sayeth to you "Ichabod."

A previous stanza talks about "the creedless chapel." Here is a whole mass of prejudices collected into a large splutter at the expense of England. If the verse means anything at all, it means that the English are nearer the beasts than the Turks.

Another of Chesterton's intellectual aberrations is his anti-Semitism. He continually denied in the columns of The Daily Herald that he was an anti-Semite, but his references to the Jews are innumerable and always on the same side. If one admits what appears to be Chesterton's contention that Judaism is largely just an exclusive form of contemporary atheism, then one is entitled to ask, Why is a wicked Gentile atheist merely an atheist, while a

Jewish atheist remains a Jew? Surely the morals of both are on the same level, and the atheism, and not the race, is the offensive feature. The Jews have their sinners and their saints, including the greatest Saint of all.

> They and they only, amongst all mankind,
> Received the transcript of the eternal mind;
> Were trusted with His own engraven laws,
> And constituted guardians of His cause:
> Their's were the prophets, their's the priestly call,
> And their's, by birth, the Saviour of us all.

Even if Chesterton cannot work himself up to Cowper's enthusiasm (and few of us can), he cannot deny that the race he is continually blackguarding was preparing his religion, and discovering the way to health at a time when his own Gentile ancestors were probably performing human sacrifices and eating worms. Unquestionably what is the matter with the modern Jew, especially of the educated classes, is that he refuses to be impressed by the Christian Church. But the Christian Church cannot fairly be said to have made herself attractive in the past; her methods of Inquisition, for example. . . .

It is difficult to write apathetically on this extreme instance of a great writer's intolerance. One single example will suffice. A year or two ago, a Jew called Beilis was put on his trial

(after an imprisonment of nearly three years) for the murder of a small Christian boy named Yushinsky, in order that his blood might be used for ritual purposes. Yushinsky, who was found dead under peculiar circumstances, was probably a Jew himself, but that does not affect the point at issue. Mr. Arthur Henderson, M.P., tried to arouse an agitation in order to secure the freedom of Beilis, because it was perfectly evident from the behaviour of certain parties that the prisoner's conviction would be the signal for the outbreak of a series of massacres of the Jews, and because a case which had taken nearly three years to prepare was obviously a very thin case. Chesterton wrote a ribald article in The Daily Herald on Mr. Henderson's attempt at intervention, saying in effect, How do you know that Beilis isn't guilty ? Now it is impossible to hold the belief that Beilis might be guilty and at the same time disbelieve that the Jews are capable of committing human sacrifice. When a leading Russian critic named Rosanov, also an anti-Semite, issued a pamphlet proclaiming that the Jews did, in fact, commit this loathsome crime, he was ignominiously ejected from a prominent Russian literary society. The comparison should appeal to Chesterton.

The nadir of these antipathies is reached in *The Flying Inn*, a novel published a few months before the Great War broke out, and before we all made the discovery that, hold what prejudices we will, we are all immensely dependent on one another. In this book we are given a picture of England of the future, conquered by the Turk. As a concession to Islam, all intoxicating drink is prohibited in England. It is amusing to note that a few months after the publication of this silly prognostication, the greatest Empire in Christendom prohibited drink within its frontiers in order to conquer the Turk—and his Allies. A Patrick Dalroy, an Irishman (with red hair), and of course a giant, has been performing Homeric feats against the conquering Turks. A Lord Ivywood, an abstraction bloodless to the point of albinism, is at the head of affairs in England. The Jews dominate everything. Dalroy and Humphrey Pump, an evicted innkeeper, discovering that drinks may still be sold where an inn-sign may be found, start journeying around England loaded only with the sign-board of "The Green Man," a large cheese, and a keg of rum. They are, in fact, a peripatetic public-house, and the only democratic institution of its kind left in England. Every other chapter the new innkeepers run

into Ivywood and his hangers-on. As the story wriggles its inconsequent length, the author curses through the mouths of his heroes. He anathematizes teetotallers, brewers, vegetarians, temperance drinks, model villages, æsthetic poets, Oriental art, Parliament, politicians, Jews, Turks, and infidels in general, futurist painting, and other things. In the end, Dalroy and Pump lead a vast insurrection, and thousands of dumb, long-suffering Englishmen attack Ivywood in his Hall, and so free their country from the Turk.

Only the songs already described in Chapter V preserve this book from extreme dullness. Technically it is poor. The action is as scattered as the parts of a futurist picture. A whole chapter is devoted to a picture of a newspaper editor at work, inventing the phraseology of indefiniteness. Epigrams are few and are very much overworked. Once a catchword is sprung, it is run to death. The Turk who by means of silly puns attempts to prove that Islamic civilization is better than European, never ceases in his efforts. The heartlessness of Ivywood is continuous, and ends in insanity.

Parts of *The Flying Inn* convey the impression that Chesterton was tired of his own style and his own manner of controversy, and had taken to parodying himself. The arguments

of the already-mentioned Turk, for example, might well pass for a really good parody of the theological dispute in the first chapter of *The Ball and the Cross*. There, it may be remembered, two men (more or less) discussed the symbolism of balls and crosses. In *The Flying Inn* people discuss the symbolism of crescents and crosses, and the Turk, Misysra Ammon, explains, " When the English see an English youth, they cry out ' He is crescent ! ' But when they see an English aged man, they cry out ' He is cross ! ' " On these lines a great deal of *The Flying Inn* is written.

We now come to Chesterton's political decadence, traceable, like many features in his history, to Mr. Hilaire Belloc. The friendship between G.K.C. and the ex-Liberal M.P. for Rochdale bore a number of interesting fruits. There were the amusing illustrations to The Great Enquiry, an amusing skit on the Tariff Reform League, to Emmanuel Burden and The Green Overcoat. But curious artificialities sprang into existence, like so many funguses, under the lengthening shadow of Mr. Belloc. To him is due the far-fetchedness of some of Chesterton's pleading in support of the miraculous element in religion. To him also is due the growing antipathy against the Liberal Party and the party system in general.

Up to the end of January, 1913, Chesterton had continued his connection with The Daily News. On January 28th there took place, at the Queen's Hall, London, a debate between Mr. Bernard Shaw and Mr. Hilaire Belloc. The latter moved "That if we do not re-establish the institution of property, we shall re-establish the institution of slavery; there is no third course." The debate was an extremely poor affair, as neither combatant dealt, except parenthetically, with his opponent's points. In the course of it Mr. Shaw, to illustrate an argument, referred to Chesterton as "a flourishing property of Mr. Cadbury," a remark which G.K.C. appears to have taken to heart. His quarrel with official Liberalism was at the moment more bitter than ever before. Mr. Belloc had taken a very decided stand on the Marconi affair, and Mr. Cecil Chesterton, G.K.C.'s brother, was sturdily supporting him. The Daily News, on the other hand, was of course vigorously defending the Government. Chesterton suddenly severed his long connection with The Daily News and came over to The Daily Herald. This paper, which is now defunct, except in a weekly edition, was the organ of Syndicalism and rebellion in general. In a letter to the editor of The Herald, Chesterton explained with

pathetic irony that The Daily News "had come to stand for almost everything I disagree with; and I thought I had better resign before the next great measure of social reform made it illegal to go on strike."

A week or so later, Chesterton started his series of Saturday articles in The Daily Herald. His first few efforts show that he made a determined attempt to get down to the intellectual level of the Syndicalist. But anybody who sits down to read through these articles will notice that before many weeks had passed Chesterton was beginning to feel a certain discomfort in the company he was keeping. He writes to say that he likes writing for The Daily Herald because it is the most revolutionary paper he knows, "even though I do not agree with all the revolutions it advocates," and goes on to state that, personally, he likes most of the people he meets. Having thus, as it were, cleared his conscience in advance, Chesterton let himself go. He attacked the Government for its alleged nepotism, dishonesty, and corruption. He ended one such article with, "There is nothing but a trumpet at midnight, calling for volunteers." The New Statesman then published an article, "Trumpets and How to Blow Them," suggesting, among other things, that there was little use

in being merely destructive. It is typical of what I have called the decadence of Chesterton that he borrowed another writer's most offensive description of a lady prominently connected with The New Statesman in order to quote it with glee by way of answer to this article. The Syndicalist hates the Socialist for his catholicity. The Socialist wishes to see the world a comfortable place, the Syndicalist merely wishes to work in a comfortable factory. Chesterton seized the opportunity, being mildly rebuked by a Socialist paper, to declare that the Fabians "are constructing a man-trap." A little later on he writes, with reference to a controversialist's request, that he should explain why, after all, he was not a Socialist:

> If he wants to know what the Marconi Scandal has saved us from, I can tell him. It has saved us from Socialism. My God! what Socialism, and run by what sort of Socialists! My God! what an escape! If we had transferred the simplest national systems to the State (as we wanted to do in our youth) it is to these men that we should have transferred them.

There never was an example of more muddled thinking. Let us apply it to something definite, to that harmless, necessary article of diet, milk, to be precise, cow's milk. To-day milk is made expensive by a multiplicity of

men who have interests in keeping milk expensive. There are too many milkmen's wages to be paid, too many milk-carts to be built, too many shop-rents paid, and too much apparatus bought, simply because we have not yet had the intelligence to let any municipality or county run its own milk-service and so avoid all manner of duplication. Chesterton's answer to this is: "I used to think so, but what about Lord Murray, Mr. Lloyd George, and Mr. Godfrey Isaacs?" It would be as relevant to say, "What about Dr. Crippen, Jack Sheppard, and Ananias," or, "But what about Mr. Bernard Shaw, the Grand Duke Nicolas, and my brother?" The week later Chesterton addresses the Labour Party in these words:

Comrades (I mean gentlemen), there is only one real result of anything you have done. You have justified the vulgar slander of the suburban Conservatives that men from below are men who merely want to rise. It is a lie. No one knows so well as you that it was a lie: you who drove out Grayson and deserted Lansbury. Before you went into Parliament to represent the working classes, the working classes were feared. Since you have represented the working classes, they are not even respected. Just when there was a hope of Democracy, you have revived the notion that the demagogue was only the sycophant. Just when there had begun to be an

English people to represent, you have been paid to misrepresent them. Get out of our path. Take your money; go.

Regarding which passage there is only to be said that it is grossly unjust both to the Labour Party and to the working classes. It was followed up in subsequent numbers by violent attacks on woman suffrage and the economic independence of women; a proceeding quite commendably amusing in a paper with a patron saint surnamed Pankhurst. A promise to say no more about Votes for Women was followed by several more spirited references to it, from the same point of view. After which Chesterton cooled off and wrote about detective stories, telephones, and worked himself down into an all-round fizzle of disgust at things as they are, to illustrate which "I will not run into a paroxysm of citations again," as Milton said in the course of his Epistle in two books on Reformation in England.

The most unpleasant feature of The Daily Herald articles is the assumption of superiority over the British working man, expressing itself in the patronizing tone. The British working man, as Chesterton sees him, is a very different person from what he is. If the Middle Ages had been the peculiar period Chesterton appears to believe it was, then his working

man would be merely a trifling anachronism of five centuries or so. But he is not even that. Five centuries would be but a trifle compared with the difference between him and his real self. Chesterton's attitude towards the working man must resemble that of a certain chivalrous knight towards the distressed damsel he thought he had rescued. He observed, "Well, little one, aren't you going to show me any gratitude?" And the lady replied, "I wasn't playing Andromeda, fathead, I was looking for blackberries. Run away and play."

The attitude of the middle-class suburbanite towards the working man and his wife is not exactly graceful, but the former at any rate does not pretend to love the latter, and to find all decency of feeling and righteousness of behaviour in them. Chesterton both pretends to reverence the working classes, and exhibits a profound contempt for them. He is never happier than when he is telling the working classes that they are wrong. He delights in attacking the Labour Party in order to have the supreme satisfaction of demonstrating that working men are their own worst enemies.

At the beginning of August, 1914, the Great War broke out, and everything seemed changed. No man now living will be able to say definitely what effects the war will have upon literature,

but one thing is certain : nothing will remain the same. We have already learned to view each other with different eyes. For better or for worse, old animosities and party cleavages have given way to unforeseen combinations. To assert that we have all grown better would be untrue. But it might reasonably be argued that the innate generousness of the British people has been vitiated by its childlike trust in its journalists, and the men who own them. When Mr. Bernard Shaw wrote a brilliant defence of the British case for intervention in the war, his mild denigration of some of the defects of the English nation, a few trivial inaccuracies, and his perverse bellicosity of style made him the object of the attentions of a horde of panic-stricken heresy-hunters. Those of us who had not the fortune to escape the Press by service abroad, especially those of us who derived our living from it, came to loathe its misrepresentation of the English people. There seemed no end to the nauseous vomits of undigested facts and dishonourable prejudices that came pouring out in daily streams. Then we came to realize, as never before, the value of such men as Chesterton. Christianity and the common decencies fare badly at the hands of the bishops of to-day, and the journalists threw them over as soon as the

war began. But, unfortunately for us all, G.K.C. fell seriously ill in the early period of the war, and was in a critical state for many months. But not before he had published a magnificent recantation—for it is no less—of all those bitternesses which, in their sum, had very nearly caused him to hate the British. It is a poem, *Blessed are the Peacemakers.*

Of old with a divided heart
I saw my people's pride expand,
Since a man's soul is born apart
By mother earth and fatherland.

I knew, through many a tangled tale,
Glory and truth not one but two :
King, Constable and Amirail
Took me like trumpets : but I knew

A blacker thing than blood's own dye
Weighed down great Hawkins on the sea ;
And Nelson turned his blindest eye
On Naples and on liberty.

Therefore to you my thanks, O throne,
O thousandfold and frozen folk,
For whose cold frenzies all your own
The Battle of the Rivers broke ;

Who have no faith a man could mourn,
Nor freedom any man desires ;
But in a new clean light of scorn
Close up my quarrel with my sires ;

Who bring my English heart to me,
Who mend me like a broken toy ;
Till I can see you fight and flee,
And laugh as if I were a boy.

When we read this poem, with its proclamation of a faith restored, Chesterton's temporary absence from the field of letters appears even more lamentable. For even before his breakdown he had given other signs of a resurrection. Between the overworked descriptions of *The Flying Inn* and the little book *The Barbarism of Berlin* which closely followed it, there is a fine difference of style, as if in the interval Chesterton had taken a tonic. Thus there is a jolly passage in which, describing German barbarism, he refers to the different ways of treating women.

The two extremes of the treatment of women might be represented by what are called the respectable classes in America and in France. In America they choose the risk of comradeship; in France the compensation of courtesy. In America it is practically possible for any young gentleman to take any young lady for what he calls (I deeply regret to say) a joy-ride; but at least the man goes with the woman as much as the woman with the man. In France the young woman is protected like a nun while she is unmarried; but when she is a mother she is really a holy woman; and when she is a grandmother she is a holy terror. By both extremes the woman gets something back out of life. France and America aim alike at equality—America by similarity; France by dissimilarity. But North Germany does actually aim at inequality. The woman stands up, with no more irritation than a butler; the man sits down, with no more embarrassment than a guest.

And so on. It runs very easily; we recognize the old touch; the epigrams are not worked to death; and the chains of argument are not mere strings of damped brilliancies. And before 1914 had come to its end, in another pamphlet, *Letters to an Old Garibaldian*, the same style, the same freshness of thought, and the same resurgent strength were once again in evidence. Then illness overcame.

Of all futures, the future of literature and its professors is the least predictable. We have all, so to speak, turned a corner since August, 1914, but we have not all turned the same way. Chesterton would seem to have felt the great change early in the war. Soon he will break his silence, and we shall know whether we have amongst us a giant with strength renewed or a querulous Nonconformist Crusader, agreeing with no man, while claiming to speak for every man. Early in the course of this study a distinction was drawn between Christians and Crusaders. Chesterton has been throughout his career essentially a Crusader. He set out to put wrongs to rights in the same spirit; in much the same spirit, too, he incidentally chivvied about the Jews he met in his path, just as the Crusaders had done. He fought for the Holy Sepulchre, and gained it. Like the

Crusaders, he professed orthodoxy, and, like them, fell between several "orthodoxies." He shared their visions and their faith, so far as they had any. But one thing is true of all Crusaders, they are not necessarily Christians. And there is that about Chesterton which sometimes makes me wonder whether, after all, he is not "a child of the French Revolution" in a sense he himself does not suspect. He has cursed the barren fig-tree of modern religious movements. But there comes a suspicion that he denies too much; that from between those supple sentences and those too plausible arguments one may catch a glimpse of the features of a mocking spirit. Chesterton has given us the keenest enjoyment, and he has provoked thought, even in the silly atheist. We all owe him gratitude, but no two readers of his works are likely to agree as to the causes of their gratitude. That, in itself, is a tribute. Wherefore let it be understood that in writing this study I have been speaking entirely for myself, and if any man think me misguided, inappreciative, hypercritical, frivolous, or anything else, why, he is welcome.

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